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Happy New Tory

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LIB DEMS NEW YEAR RESOLUTION

FOUR YEARS ago Tony Blair was sharply criticised when it was revealed that he had taken a new year holiday in Egypt at the local taxpayers' expense.

In his Commons Register of Interests entry, the Vicar admitted that "in December 2001/ January 2002, accompanied by my family, I spent six nights as a guest of the Egyptian Government at two private Government villas at the New Tower Hotel in Sharm-el-Sheikh, Egypt. The Egyptian Government also provided my family and I [sic] with a return flight from Cairo to Sharm-el-Sheikh."

Although Blair subsequently made donations to "a charity of the Egyptian government's choice", this failed to stem the criticism from Lib Dem MP Norman Baker: "The fact he accepted hospitality may be above board but some people may feel it will have an impact on his approach to the Middle East. It would have been better if he had refused the offer and paid his own way rather than having allowed this convoluted arrangement."

A chance to find out whether it had "an impact on his approach to the Middle East" came on Christmas Eve when Egypt's opposition leader Ayman Nour was sentenced to five years' hard labour for fraud in an election that was won by Hosni Mubarak, Egypt's leader for almost 25 years. Nur always denied the charge, and the trial has been denounced by human rights groups as clear case of political persecution. The American government, too, was remarkably forthright in its condemnation, given that Egypt is one of its staunchest allies: "The United States is deeply troubled by the conviction... [which] calls into question Egypt's commitment to democracy, freedom, and the rule of law." There has since been a blizzard of statements from Washington expressing alarm at Nour's declining health (he is on hunger strike), calling for his immediate release and warning that America's military and economic assistance for Egypt – worth $1.8bn a year – will now be reassessed.

London, by contrast, has been most restrained in its criticism. As president of the European Union, Britain issued a brief statement on behalf of the EU worrying about the "negative signals" the verdict might send out but expressing confidence that "any appeal application by Nour will be looked at fairly by the Egyptian courts". No British minister has officially commented.

But then again, perhaps the matter is already being taken up by a very senior member of the government who just happened to be enjoying a winter break in Egypt's sunny climes last week. Step forward... Tony Blair.

"So much for the end of the Cold War"

EDITORIAL

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Published by Pressdram Ltd, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN. **Printed** by BGP Ltd, Bicester OX6 7QZ .
Distributed by P.E. Distributions, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN. 020 7437 4017.

ABC

ONE thing Tony Blair really must sort out before he quits is the confusion about the going rate for an honour. In the days of Maundy Gregory and Lloyd George, everyone knew where they stood: a peerage cost £100,000 (about £2m in today's money), while a donation of £40,000 would get you a baronetcy.

But what now? Just after Christmas it was revealed that the House of Lords appointments commission had blocked the PM's latest "Lavender List" of peerages for tycoons, pending further inquiries. The nominees include property developer Sir David Garrard (Labour donation: £200,000); curry mogul Sir Gulam Noon (Labour donations: £220,000); but also stockbroker Barry Townsley (see In the City, page 30), who has given a mere £6,000 to the party. True, Townsley also sponsored one of Blair's beloved "city academies" (as did Garrard), but the same can't be said of our old mate Chai Patel, whose party donation was a modest £10,000.

"The embarrassment for Labour," a source close to the committee told the *Independent* last week, "is that some people are due to get honours and, if they don't get them, they will have a right to be peeved."

Well, maybe they shouldn't be so greedy. Honours other than peerages are much easier to smuggle through, as software tycoon Mike Lynch has learned. Last June he gave £20,000 to Labour; in the New Year honours last week he collected an OBE.

ON Christmas Day the mass-circulation Greek paper *Proto Thema* alleged that the MI6 station chief in Athens, Nick Langman, had been involved in the interrogation of 28 Pakistani migrants in Greece after the 7 July bombings.

The Foreign Office dismissed the story as "utter nonsense" – only to admit, a week later, that Langman had indeed been present at the interrogations. But the FO denies that he participated in any brutality towards the suspects. Meanwhile, Langman has been recalled to London, his cover irretrievably blown.

Yet our media continue to pretend that his identity is a close secret. The BBC claimed that "the UK government has forbidden the media from naming the man", a line repeated by several newspapers and embellished with vague mutterings about D-Notices.

Poppycock. Publication of Langman's name has not been "forbidden" or "banned". D-Notices are now actually called DA-Notices, short for "defence advisory", and as the name suggests they are simply recommendations, lacking any legal standing. The DA-notice relevant to this case is the one that discourages the naming of serving MI6 officers. The reason is obvious enough: it could put them in mortal danger if their cover is blown while they are in the field.

But all rules have their exceptions. In February 2005 the *Mail on Sunday* was happy to report that Christopher Looms, a senior British war crimes investigator with the UN, was allegedly an MI6 spy, since the Croatian media had already named him anyway. In 2004 many British papers identified Dominic Lawson's brother-in-law Anthony Monckton as MI6's main man in the Balkans, once his name and photo had appeared on the front page of Serbian newspaper *Nedeljni Telegraf*. A few years earlier, when the MI6 station chief in Prague was identified on Czech TV as being Christopher Hurran, Fleet Street again felt there was no point in keeping mum when the name was now freely available.

The same applies *fortissimo* to Langman, whose cover was blown years ago anyway as he appears on a famous Internet list of spooks (which is of intense interest to Princess Diana obsessives as he was one of two MI6 officers in Paris at the time of her death). So what earthly purpose is served by the media pretending it's a secret? The only effect will be to confirm every conspiracy theorist's worst suspicions.

OVER Christmas Radio 4 broadcast a debate on terrorism recorded at the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), the top people's strategic think-tank.

Listeners heard Professor Conor Gearty of the LSE argue that *all* anti-terrorism laws are wrong, needless and counter-productive, leading to a police state. Up against him was a quartet of heavies – Dr Jonathan Eyal of RUSI, Edward Garnier MP, Alasdair Palmer of the *Sunday Telegraph* and Jan Berry of the Police Federation, who challenged Gearty loudly and often.

But for some reason Radio 4 edited out the conclusion. When moderator Gavyn Davies asked the audience of highly respectable RUSI members to vote, a forest of hands shot up – ten to one in favour of the professor! No doubt the BBC feared this might provoke heart attacks among listeners of a sensitive disposition.

"I can't belive anyone has such amazing powers"

Street Of Shame

WILL the *Sun*'s new political editor, George Pascoe-Watson, be the man who finally gets to reunite Rupert Murdoch's papers with the Conservative party under fellow new broom David Cameron?

Across the globe, Murdoch appears to be in a process of realignment, with the Iraq war's fiercest cheerleaders finding themselves suddenly out of favour with the Sun King. Last month saw a sudden divorce between Murdoch and Italian premier Silvio Berlusconi – at least on a business level, with the dissolution of a four-year deal between Berlusconi's television company Mediaset and Murdoch's Sky Italia which had seen Duel TV's stripping housewives beamed into Sky boxes across the country.

Perhaps more worryingly for Berlusconi, who faces a rough ride in April's general election, Murdoch also lunched with several opposition candidates during a visit to Rome in October – just as he did a few months earlier with Senator Hillary Clinton, likely Democrat challenger to George Bush in 2008 and former number-one target for his *Fox News* channel. "Senator Clinton respects him and thinks he is smart and effective," gushed a Clinton spokesman to the *New York Observer*, while News Corp executive vice-president Gary Ginsberg responded in kind: "Rupert has respect for her political skills and for the hard work that she's done as a senator."

Where does this leave Blair – or, more importantly, Gordon Brown, who put in much valiant work on behalf of Sky's pay-per-view football monopoly during the EC investigation in November? Pascoe-Watson lost no time in letting him know that all was up for grabs, revealing on his very first day in the job that Murdoch has already met with David Cameron.

"We are very impressed by Cameron," he told the *Guardian*. "I would say that at this time, there has never been a better time for the *Sun* to look more favourably at the Conservatives."

THE *Sun* had a bruising exclusive on 16 December, with the revelation that the mother of *X Factor* winner Shayne Ward had been "nicked after a boozy bust-up".

"Philomena Ward, 48, was carted off in a police van with two male pals," revealed hacks Guy Patrick and Danny Brierley. "She was arrested on suspicion of assault after fists flew in Manchester's Piccadilly Tavern. Bouncer Luke Ashworth, 22, claims he was punched as the row spilled out into the street and has been left nursing a two-inch cut to his face. He said 'Philomena was being mouthy. Every second word was f***. She was pushing and shoving and trying to get back in the pub."

How kind of *Sun* editor Rebekah Wade to offer her readers a timely reminder that in this festive season, drink-related embarrassments can happen to the best of us…

SHORTLY before Christmas a fashion assistant at the *Sun*, Natasha, was dismayed to find that the new dress she'd just bought herself had gone missing.

The culprit? Step forward Rebekah Wade – who, lacking a new outfit for the office party, had strolled over to the fashion department and borrowed one she found hanging up there.

STANDING in as press columnist for the *Independent*, Donald "Pixie" Trelford cast his gaze on events at the *Telegraph* where John Bryant has taken over from Martin Newland in the editor's chair.

Trelford gave his opinion that Bryant was a "reliable old pro" who had already enjoyed one "personal triumph" at the *Telegraph* and could be defended against charges of "dumbing down".

With any luck Bryant will bear in mind this endorsement if he ever gets round to looking at his sports pages and wondering whether it's worth retaining a monthly sports column written by one D. Trelford.

A FEW days before Christmas the *Mirror* published a long and furious attack on George Best's ex-wife Alex by the footballer's sister Julie Nixon.

"The best thing she could have done for George was to ban alcohol from the home," Nixon told the paper. "She didn't need to be teetotal, but she needed to be sensitive about George's illness." Instead, as the *Mirror* noted indignantly, Alex "undermined George's battle against the bottle by frequently flaunting booze in front of him".

Unlike the ever-sensitive *Mirror*, which in January 1996 dispatched Brian Reade to Best's local pub to ply him with Hooch and Piranha. The challenge was simple: "Could the legendary drinker handle 24 glasses of alcoholic lemonade?" In fact Best gave up after six glasses, complaining it was too sweet, and switched to white wine.

A photo of this tasteless stunt can still be found in the *Mirror* archives – but, curiously, wasn't used in any of the paper's countless tributes after his death. Why so coy?

"When are you going to make an honest man of me?"

ALBERT Scardino, executive editor of the *Grauniad* until last autumn, gave his former colleagues a lovely Christmas present by denouncing them in a rival paper.

"The commercial side of the *Guardian* has refused to move with the times," he told the *Daily Telegraph*. "Journalistically the paper is one of the most successful of its generation. But the commercial and managerial sides of the *Guardian* are a failure by any meaningful performance benchmark."

He may have a point. *Grauniad* managing director Carolyn McCall and editor Alan Rusbridger have already received "Berliner bonuses" of £195,000 and £150,000 respectively, even though the £100m Berliner relaunch hasn't lifted circulation significantly; and the national newspaper division of the Guardian Media Group lost £48.3m last year, as against a loss of £6.2m in 2004.

But Scardino may not be the ideal person to make the point. If he reckons the *Grauniad*'s commercial and managerial record is a failure by any benchmark, what does he think of his own dear wife, *Financial Times* boss Dame Marjorie Scardino? Back in 1997, when she became chief executive of the *FT*'s parent company Pearson, she pledged that within five years the share price (then 666p) would have doubled. Five years later the price was… 612p. It has continued to underperform the FTSE index ever since – a record described as "grisly and horrible" by Pearson chairman Lord Stevenson at the last AGM.

In 2004-5 the company's pre-tax profits fell by 6 percent and the *FT* (once a big money-spinner) lost £9m. A failure, surely, by any meaningful benchmark? Apparently not: to the fury of some shareholders, Pearson promptly awarded Dame Marje a "performance bonus" of £831,000. If Albert Scardino felt any outrage, however, he wisely kept it to himself.

EVER since the verdict in the City Slickers trial, Piers "Morgan" Moron has been complaining loudly that he was unable to have his say in court since no one called him as a witness.

"I was champing at the bit to speak out," he assured the *Evening Standard*. On the *Today* programme he stated unambiguously: "I wasn't called as a witness for the prosecution or the defence, much as I would like to have been."

This is a lie. As we pointed out in the last *Eye*, Moron was twice asked to appear as a witness by lawyers for the Slickers' co-defendant, Terry Shepherd – but he refused.

Now, at last, he has owned up to it. "I didn't want to go into court on behalf of a bloke I'd never heard of," he tells the *Independent on Sunday*. "I didn't think it was appropriate." Besides, he adds, "I knew what would happen the moment I was called. I would have a barrel load of shit… and it would all be taken as gospel by the bloodthirsty hacks who would make sure that I was buried on a daily basis for the six weeks of the trial. I don't think that's fair, personally." In other words, far from "champing at the bit", he was determined not to go into the witness box *under any circumstances*.

Moron says his *Sindie* interview will be the last time he ever talks about the shares scandal. Given his propensity to contradict himself every time he opens his mouth on the subject, this is probably a wise decision. As he tells the paper, in a verdict few will dispute: "I fully accept that I'm a morally defunct human being."

FOLLOWING the sale of the *Scotsman* and *Scotland on Sunday* by his bosses the Barclay brothers, Andrew Neil was finally forced to admit that there was trouble elsewhere in his diminished empire.

"We have to, in the next year or so, make sure at some stage that we reach break even," he admitted of *The Business*, the limp pink organ the Barclays gave him to play with eight years ago. "This year we will have around £3.5m in losses. Next year we want to get that to nearer £2m."

How does Neil hope to achieve such a lofty aspiration? By providing something no reader will be able to resist, as he demonstrated in the edition of 11/12 December. A large part of the front page, as well as pages four and five in their entirety, were given over to the thoughts of… Chairman Brillo, in the form of a 6,000 word lecture on the Hayekian worldview he had delivered to the Institute of Economic Affairs a few days previously (readers of the *Spectator*, which he also oversees, were subjected to a mere 3,334 words of edited highlights). The headline chosen by Brillo's loyal staff for this vast tranche of text? "The Fatal Conceit."

A NEW YEAR, and an old tradition at the *Daily Express*, which, as is customary, devoted Monday's front page to Princess Diana, still dead after eight years.

The latest shocking scoop was that the investigation team led by former Met chief Sir John Stevens – the one which was set up two years ago with a brief to "look at every single aspect of conspiracy theories and do everything we can to draw a line one way or the other under this inquiry" – had, as Stevens promised to do in April 2004, interviewed MI6 officers who had been based in Paris in 1997.

How did the *Express* present this unsurprising piece of news? "DIANA: THERE *WAS* A COVER-UP."

HACKWATCH AWARDS 2005

MYSTIC MOGG AWARD THE GENERAL election provided many shortlisted candidates – including the great Mogg himself, who informed *Times* readers on polling day (5 May) that "the Tories probably have a lead of between 5 and 10 percent". There were strong entries from Andreas Whittam Strobes ("The most likely outcome of the 2005 election is, as in 1974, a hung parliament" – *Independent*, 21 March), the irrepressible Simon Heffer ("The hung parliament scenario is increasingly possible" – *Daily Mail*, 15 April), Colin Brown ("Mr Howard will not resign in the aftermath of a defeat, as did his predecessor, William Hague" – *Independent*, 3 May).

There was a particularly heroic showing by Mogg's fellow peer Lord St John of Fawsley, who told *Evening Standard* readers on 14 April that the likeliest election outcomes were "a hung Parliament, or even a Conservative victory" – only 11 days after he had also declared that Charles and Camilla certainly wouldn't postpone their wedding if it clashed with the papal funeral. "I think they are so anxious to get 8 April out of the way, if there were an eclipse of the sun they would stick to that date." The royal couple promptly postponed the wedding by a day.

But the winner is sharp-as-an-aubergine pundit Tony Parsons, whose *Mirror* column on 10 January confidently predicting the outcome of *Celebrity Big Brother* – "My money is on Germaine [Greer] to win" – appeared the day before she walked out of the house.

JOINED-UP EDITING AWARD CONGRATULATIONS TO the Daily Telegraph, which on 26 February ran a long article about the evils of "the casino culture" – a harrowing account of the wretched, debt-ridden existence that most punters have in the US, and that the UK is about to replicate. Shortly before the piece appeared, subscribers to the Telegraph online service were bombarded with special offers from "Ritz Casino online", a spin-off from the hugely profitable Ritz Hotel casino, which is owned by the Barclay brothers – proprietors of the Daily Telegraph.

E. I. ADDIO AWARD "THE WELSH victory over Ireland was far more comfortable than the 32-20 scoreline suggests…" – *Sunday Times*, 20 March, Sport p.1

"The game was closer and more hard-fought than the 32-20 scoreline might indicate…" – *Sunday Times*, 20 March, Sport p.2

AMNESIA AWARD THE *DAILY MAIL* thundered against the "crashing insensitivity" of Prince Harry, "who thought it a wonderful jape to turn up at that fancy-dress party in a Wehrmacht uniform, complete with Nazi armband… He was making a damned fool of himself and giving intolerable insult to others." Only someone utterly ignorant of history, it claimed, would wear such an outfit for fun – such as, presumably, the dozens of *Mail* executives and hacks who thought it a wonderful jape to attend a leaving party for Sir David English in 1992

wearing, er, Wehrmacht uniforms with Nazi armbands.

But even the *Mail* couldn't match the outright winner, the *Daily Express*, which described the fancy-dress scandal as "the worst blunder in a series of embarrassments Harry has caused the royal family" – forgetting that last year its own proprietor, Richard "Dirty" Desmond, enlivened a meeting at the West Ferry printing company by goose-stepping up and down the room making "Sieg Heil" salutes before leading *Express* executives in a chorus of "Deutschland Über Alles".

POLLY FILLER AWARD "LUCKILY, OUR new male Brazilian au pair had decided not to take his family's advice to return home after the Stockwell shooting, and came with us to queue and help with the meltdown control brought on by over-excitement (kids) and exhaustion (me)." – Julia Hobsbawm, *New Statesman*.

SILENCE IS GOLDEN AWARD IN FEBRUARY, while other papers gleefully dissected the list of the PM's weekend guests at Chequers since 1997, the *Guardian* refused to cover the story at all – possibly because the guests included *Grauniad* editor Alan Rusbridger and his wife, plus *Grauniad* hacks Polly Toynbee and David Walker. By contrast the *Mail* cleared its front page and a two-page spread inside for the complete list of "Tony's Chequers chums". Well, almost complete. The one name omitted from its roll of shame, even though she and her husband enjoyed a convivial Chequers dinner in the winter of 1997, was the late Lynda Lee-Potter of the *Daily Mail*.

CORRECTION OF THE YEAR "'SHEEP MIGHT be dumb… but they're not stupid' (News, last week) said that studies in Oxford showed that a Caledonian heifer called Betty had managed to bend a piece of wire to construct a hook and retrieve food from a jar. Betty is, in fact, a New Caledonian crow, a creature perhaps better adapted to bending wire than a cow." – *Observer*, 13 March.

MOST PIOUS EDITOR A SHOO-IN for Martin Newland of the *Daily Telegraph*, who ran this front-page headline on Saturday 2 April as the Pope lay dying: "His faith is so full and so strong he is already touching the Lord" – printed without inverted commas, as if it were a verifiable fact. Better still was his front-page splash two days later, after the Pope's death: "To our unforgettable Father we say, may angels guide you to paradise." Newland, a devout Catholic, was guided by angels to resign a few months later.

MOST TASTEFUL GLENDA "BREAST CANCER can also serve as a wake-up call that something is not working properly in your life… Perhaps, Kylie, you have been neglecting to listen to your true feelings?… Enjoy the new perspective on life that cancer has given you." – Tania Yelland, *Daily Mail*.

SCOOP OF THE YEAR "THE IDENTITY of the secret agent who assassinated Georgi Markov, the Bulgarian dissident, with a poison pellet umbrella on Waterloo Bridge in London has finally been revealed," the *Sunday Times* reported excitedly on 5 June. The culprit was Francesco Giullino, a Dane of Italian origin who worked for the Bulgarian secret service under the codename "Agent Piccadilly".

Admirable work – even if an almost identical story pinning the crime on Giullino, aka Agent Piccadilly, first appeared on 26 January 1997 in … the *Sunday Times*.

GISSA JOB PRIZE A RARE DOUBLE: the prize goes to Tania Yelland's ex-husband David, the former *Sun* editor turned PR suit, for his *Observer* article on 29 May. "If you take a look at leading companies, whether they be BP or Tesco, Coca-Cola or British Airways, they all communicate superbly." Yelland omitted to mention that the PR man in charge of Coca-Cola's "superb" communications was, er, himself – and that at the time he wrote the *Observer* piece Tesco was also considering whether to hire him as a PR consultant. Just over a week later, he duly got the job.

MOST VERSATILE HACK "OLYMPIC BID in Tatters" screamed the *Observer*'s front-page headline on 30 January, above a story by sports correspondent Denis Campbell. "London has in effect abandoned hope of winning the 2012 Olympic Games," he revealed, "because it is so far behind rival Paris." Six months later, the *Observer* celebrated the Olympic verdict with a 10,000-word article hailing the London campaign as "a triumphant mix of seduction, politicking and inspiration". It was written by, er, Denis Campbell.

OLDIE OF THE YEAR "MANY PEOPLE in their last working years will have to do humbler jobs than they have been used to, for less pay. This will be hard for fat cats to get used to, but it seems inevitable and right." – Sir Max Hastings, former editor of the *Daily Telegraph* and *Evening Standard*, now reduced to freelancing for the *Grauniad*, 13 June.

MOST FEARLESS PUNDIT "WHY ARE women allowed to beat up men?" demanded *Sun* columnist Jane Moore. "A bizarre assumption inflicts our society that when a man hits a woman it's wrong, but when she dishes out the blows it's somehow less of a crime. It isn't, and it shouldn't be treated as such. Violently unhinged behaviour isn't exclusive to the male species… Considering the law's promise to take domestic violence matters a lot more seriously, it's a disgrace that his attacker has got off scot-free."

Strong stuff – but she was writing in June, about the attack on George Best by his female partner. A few months later, when *Sun* editor Rebekah Wade also got off scot-free despite beating up her husband, Moore had not a word to say about the "disgrace".

DINNERTIME O'BOOZE AWARD AS EVER, the British Press Awards had enough yobbery and binge-drinking to merit a hundred Asbos. The event featured winners calling their defeated rivals "twats", "knobheads" and "arseholes", drunken heckling and booing, threats of fisticuffs, a stand-up row between Bob Geldof and the editor of the *Daily Mirror* – and an announcement by 11 newspaper editors that they were now withdrawing their support from the annual ceremony because of the "decline in conduct and prestige". Or, as ex-*Observer* editor and chair of the judges Donald Trelford put it in his introduction to the event's programme: "The British Press Awards show our newspapers at their finest, and make us proud of our trade."

WITH construction costs for the London Olympics estimated at £1.2bn, Culture Secretary Tessa Jowell recently announced that she was "determined that the 2012 games are delivered on time and within the funding envelope". Sounds like a job for the private finance initiative, as the government continues to insist this is what PFI achieves – despite evidence to the contrary.

The industry is duly gearing up for a further bonanza, led by Partnerships UK ("PUK"), the privatised Treasury PFI taskforce whose job is to promote the initiative. At its ambitious "Meeting the UK's Infrastructure Requirements" conference, PUK director Stephen Dance talked on "The Olympics: developing the legacy and models for regeneration", revealing that he had provided advice to the culture department on the use of PFI as the bid was prepared and continues to support the delivery authority on procurement.

Prior to joining PUK in 2003 Dance was a director of property consultancy DBZ, where his main claim to fame was advising Mapeley on the STEPS PFI deal that saw the Revenue and Customs' buildings sold to an offshore company, and which was beset by problems from day one (see *Eyes passim ad nauseam*). Not least of the difficulties was that Mapeley and its advisers had seriously underestimated the costs of servicing the buildings, a fairly basic mistake in a PFI deal.

Don't be surprised if Jowell eventually has to find a larger "funding envelope".

A FEW details of the settlement between EDS and HM Revenue and Customs over the tax credits cock-up (see *Eye* 1147) emerged before a parliamentary committee last month when chairman David Varney revealed that, of the £71.25m (tax deductible) settlement, £44.5m had been paid in "cash or the equivalent of cash".

He wouldn't say what the equivalent of cash was (chocolate buttons, perhaps?), nor give any detail of when or how the balance (in something not equivalent to cash) would be paid on the grounds that the deal allowed HMRC to sue EDS if it breached the terms of the settlement and revealing too much might prejudice any future legal action.

The settlement looks increasingly like a bargain for a company that in Varney's words "acknowledged responsibility for the IT problems that arose", and leaving the terms slightly open-ended averts any awkward public scrutiny.

To discuss the details the committee immediately reconvened in private. Meanwhile, questions on the deal from Lib Dem David Laws have met with the inevitable "commercial-in-confidence" stonewall.

OVER the years Revenue and Customs have become expert at glossing over expensive cock-ups; but HMRC surpassed even its own high standards in its annual report before Christmas.

Commenting on the "lorry road user charge" programme – Transport Secretary Alistair Darling's bright idea that was unceremoniously dumped last summer after armies of consultants had spent months working on it – HMRC declared "its high level of satisfaction with what the programme had achieved". It failed to say what was achieved, however, beyond some "knowledge which will help with the development of national road pricing".

Unfortunately there was no space in the 110-page glossy document to mention the costs, partially revealed in a parliamentary answer in October. £31.2m was spent on 22 consultancy firms just to prepare for procuring the technology, while the seven shortlisted bidders (including public sector foul-up veterans Siemens and Capita) also have to be compensated for their unused work on prototypes.

Exactly how much they're getting remains a matter of "commercial confidentiality", according to Treasury Minister John Healey.

All told, the cost of this "highly satisfactory" project is likely to exceed the value of the compensation received by HMRC from EDS for its highly *un*satisfactory role in the tax credits fiasco.

THE Department for Trade and Industry recently advertised a one-year contract for a recycling expert, demanding one day a week's work and attendance at the office just once a month.

However, as the deal is for "services" on consultancy terms, a standard salary won't be offered: instead "the department is expecting to allocate between £70,000 and £90,000 to this work". That's equivalent to a full-time rate of around £300,000 – well off the civil service pay scale.

PS: The DTI is to lay off around 1,500 staff as part of the government's "efficiency" review.

NEW YEAR HONOURS

THE new year gongs demonstrate yet again how highly Tony Blair regards the honourable occupation of transferring large amounts of cash from the public to the private sector.

Hence a CBE for **British Energy chairman Adrian Montague**, upgraded to Sir Adrian for services to the nuclear industry as chairman of a company that has been repeatedly bailed out by taxpayers. Alas, there was no mention in the citation of the advice he gave to previous governments on the disastrous break-up of the rail network, the under-performing and over-priced underground PPP or the private finance initiative that is now falling apart.

Sir Adrian currently coins it from PFI as chairman of Infrastructure Investors, which owns projects such as the disastrous Highlands and Islands airport. The deal was terminated this year… but only after the taxpayer had handed over several times the cost of the airport to the PFI company. Happily, the man who signed the millions away, ex-md **Bob McLeod**, got an OBE!

Captain of industry **David Varney** sees his move into the public sector as chairman of **HM Revenue and Customs** pay off with a knighthood after 18 months. A damning indictment from a court this year cataloguing years of safety neglect at gas distributor Transco under his leadership, leading to four avoidable deaths (see Eye 1141), was no bar to his elevation. (In another life, as chairman of Mobile phone firm MMO2, Varney persuaded the government to invest £1.5bn in his company's "airwave" police telephone system. The National Audit Office couldn't find that his very expensive deal offered any better value than if the public sector had done the job.

NHS finance director Richard Douglas became a Companion of the Order of the Bath. One of the architects of PFI in the health service when he was deputy finance director in the 1990s, he helped pioneer the long-term transfer of cash from the NHS to the private sector. How embarrassing when, just before Christmas, his freeze on health spending was revealed! A leaked email revealed that Douglas had "imposed an embargo" on new spending – even including that announced by ministers where contracts had not physically been signed yet.

Camelot Group boss Diane Thompson got a CBE (as if her £619,000 salary weren't reward enough) despite having presided over plummeting funds to "good causes" from £1.4bn in 2000 to £1.2bn in 2004 (see Eye 1141). The bidding process for the contract to run the lottery from 2009 is already underway; and even if other firms might make a better fist of it than Camelot, the government can't really risk any disruption caused by a changeover, as this might reveal how the money for good causes is used to paper over public service cracks.

There is presumably celebration in the household of Home Office Minister Tony McNulty, whose wife **Christine Gilbert** received a CBE for her work as chief executive of **Tower Hamlets Council**, a job that includes transferring council houses to private "social" landlords and sacking staff who oppose the move (Eye 1146). Gilbert is doubly honoured, having also carried off the even more prestigious Rotten Boroughs' Spooky Family Connection Award (page 13). So well done, Christine!

Christopher Moyes, the £681,000-a-year chief executive of bus and train operator the **Go Ahead Group,** got an OBE in honour of the way his firm used millions in government subsidy to create some of the lowest satisfaction ratings for any train operator.

Also helped by the public purse was **David Woodward**, president of **BP Azerbaijan,** who became a CMG for serving "British business interests and security of energy supply". The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil export pipeline, built by BP with £150m support from the UK's Export Credit Guarantee Department, to bring oil westward from Azerbaijan, should have been up-and-running by late 2005. Woodward told the Turkish press last month that it was now likely to be mid-2006 before it is finished due to construction delays at the Turkish end. The pipeline has been dogged by allegations of poor environmental and safety standards and human rights abuses in all three countries it runs through (Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey).

Elsewhere, there is nothing the government likes better than to be lobbied – and there is a CBE for businessmen **Vincent Lawton**, president of the drugs lobby, the **Association of British Pharmaceutical Industries,** and director of **Merck Sharp and Dohme**. Lawton, it may be recalled, denounced British doctors as "Luddites" for not prescribing enough new drugs made by the companies he represents, and is continually pressing the government to license drugs more quickly. He also defended his industry against MPs who claimed that drugs firms over-promote their products and hide bad results in clinical trials. The gall!

And congratulations are due to **Alan Johnston**, director of **Westland Helicopters**, for his CBE, and **Alastair McInnes**, top salesman at **MBDA** missiles, for his OBE. Both are honoured in what this year is a greatly reduced harvest for the normally popular arms industry.

"Er... what do we do now?"

SANDPIT NEWS

"DELIGHTED British troops in Iraq cheered Tony Blair yesterday after he gave them the perfect Christmas present – news that they are going home". Oh how many of us choked on our tinned sausages when we read this in the *Sun*.

After all, some of us had just returned from a two-week deployment in the dodgier bits of Basra and were less than "delighted" to swap a proper rest in our bashers for extra guard duty around the completely safe Divisional HQ watching the prime minister mugging to the cameras.

The only people who got close to him were part of a carefully selected mix of sycophants, gurning squaddies and "soldiers of colour", including a Fijian choir. Most of these had only been in Iraq for a few weeks.

Those of us who have been here on extended tours know full well that we'll only be going home when the Iraqis (or Iranians if you're in the south) can provide their own security, not to mention a police force that is not in cahoots with the insurgents. And that's going to take years.

As for the perfect Christmas present, some decent kit would be good: we are still having to buy too much of our own gear on eBay. Oh and the arrival of our Operation Telic medals, delayed over and over again, would be a welcome seasonal gesture.

'Square Basher'

WORLD OF INQUIRIES

THE government's refusal to allow a public inquiry into the London bombings on 7 July coincided with the announcement of another inquiry into a bombing in Northern Ireland.

Lawyer Rosemary Nelson fell victim to a car-bomb in 1999, and public hearings into her death will now start on… 16 January 2007.

Before then thousands of hours of police and MI5 time will be spent preparing statements for when the three person tribunal, chaired by retired judge Sir Michael Morland, finally gets round to sitting.

At least half a dozen similar inquiries are in the pipeline, all of which will consume a huge amount of police and security service resources, potentially for years to come, with most of the investigatory work being carried out by mainland officers to avoid claims of bias from with the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI). Curiously, the desire to avoid diverting scarce police and spook manhours from day-to-day detective work, was the excuse given by Tony Blair for *not* permitting an inquiry into the London bombings!

Meanwhile, there's still no official word from the Bloody Sunday Inquiry (established 1998) which is supposedly due to report in January. Though the days are ticking by, chairman Lord Saville has so far failed to book the Londonderry Guildhall, the venue for the official unveiling of his conclusions, for a specific date. Not that the findings matter much, as there's no possibility the report will receive anything like a wide welcome, and it is certain to be the subject of multiple judicial review applications.

Although Saville (very slowly) fronted the inquiry, a total of four fellow judges sat alongside him, with two dropping out along the way, fearing that they would die before the whole thing was over. It's possible that the three remaining judges are unable to reach a unanimous verdict, in which case the (lucrative for some) fun will continue for a few months longer as minority reports are drawn up and debated.

The current estimated bill of a mere £163m excludes some legal costs and any further delay; so there's still a chance Saville will succeed in topping the £175m mark before this phase of proceedings is over.

Unwanted present 130l cement mixer, electric with stand £100ono,

Cambrian News

HOW FOI DOESN'T WORK

"THE culture of secrecy in Whitehall, and beyond, is cracking open," announced Lord Falconer in the *Guardian* last week, reflecting on the first anniversary of the Freedom of Information Act.

"We have seen real change… We seek to achieve across the whole public sector a new culture of openness, fully embedded in each and every public authority, where information is made available to the widest possible audience at the earliest possible opportunity."

Oh yeah? This has hardly been the experience of *Private Eye* and its readers over the last 12 months.

The law allows the government 20 working days (about a month) to respond to a request under the act, but it may judge that one of 24 exemptions (including some very broad let-outs such as the potential to harm "policy development" and the country's "economic interests") allows it to withhold the information.

Most exemptions only apply if disclosure would not be in the "public interest", and once a suitable exemption has been found the government has another month to ponder this question. If the request is for something it doesn't want to give up, after a couple of months (or longer: delays are common as there is no penalty for missing the deadlines) it will conclude that the public is better off remaining ignorant.

Anything but the most uncontroversial request can be rejected on these grounds and as a result many Whitehall departments refuse more than half the requests they receive. The Treasury is the most secretive, coughing up what it's asked in just 26 percent of cases.

To challenge a rejection you first have to ask for an "internal review" by the department that has just turned you down, which is when the snail-like pace decelerates. When the *Eye* recently complained to the Information Commissioner that a review by HM Revenue and Customs had taken almost three months before reaching the predictable conclusion that the reviewer's colleagues had been right to block the request, the commissioner's office replied that "there is no statutory time within which a public authority must complete a review. There is therefore no further action we can take…"

After several months, if you're lucky you'll reach the stage where the commissioner can consider your case. The *Eye's* latest referral was met with the response that a "case resolution team" will be in touch "to explain how the refusal to disclose information... will be progressed". Action at last? Not quite. "Due to the volume of complaints we are receiving [the backlog is over 1,200] at present it may be up to two months before you hear from us." And that's before the "case resolution team" even starts to think about it.

When the act came into force last year, the Department for Constitutional Affairs set up a "Freedom of Information Users group" for those such as journalists, academics and other researchers to comment on how the government answers requests. But when author and FoI campaigner Heather Brooke – one of the runners-up in last year's inaugural Paul Foot Awards – asked the DCA for a list of members of the group, she was told the list was secret – as are the criteria on which members are selected.

There is no application process, so those picked get on only at the behest of civil servants and special advisers – the very people most opposed to FoI in the first place. "We have identified those contacts we deem most appropriate whom we believe will make a significant contribution," said Rob Murphy of the DCA's Information Rights Division.

So who are these "contacts"? Even the chosen ones cannot be named, says Murphy, because they must first be cleared with ministers. How rigorous such an FoI "users group" can be, when it is micro-managed at every level by civil servants, is unclear. But at least the DCA was able to tell Brooke, who has written a book on FoI and makes frequent requests for information to government departments, one genuine nugget about the list. She isn't on it!

Twelve months ago Lord Falconer wrote of his new act: "The real test is whether there is a change in attitude across the public sector during the next few years, and whether communication between the state and its citizens is strengthened." So far the test has been dismally flunked.

LEVELLING THE PLAYING FIELDS

NO ONE knows precisely how many school and community playing fields have been lost under "new" Labour. The figure that is bandied about is 2,540; but it was arrived at by the unreliable method of deducting the number the government thinks there are now, from the number arrived at in a 1992 Sports Council tally made using different criteria.

SportEngland's £12m *Active Places* survey should have provided a more accurate picture by June 2005, but it still hasn't been produced. Experts, including the National Playing Fields Association, suspect the 2,540 may be a considerable underestimate.

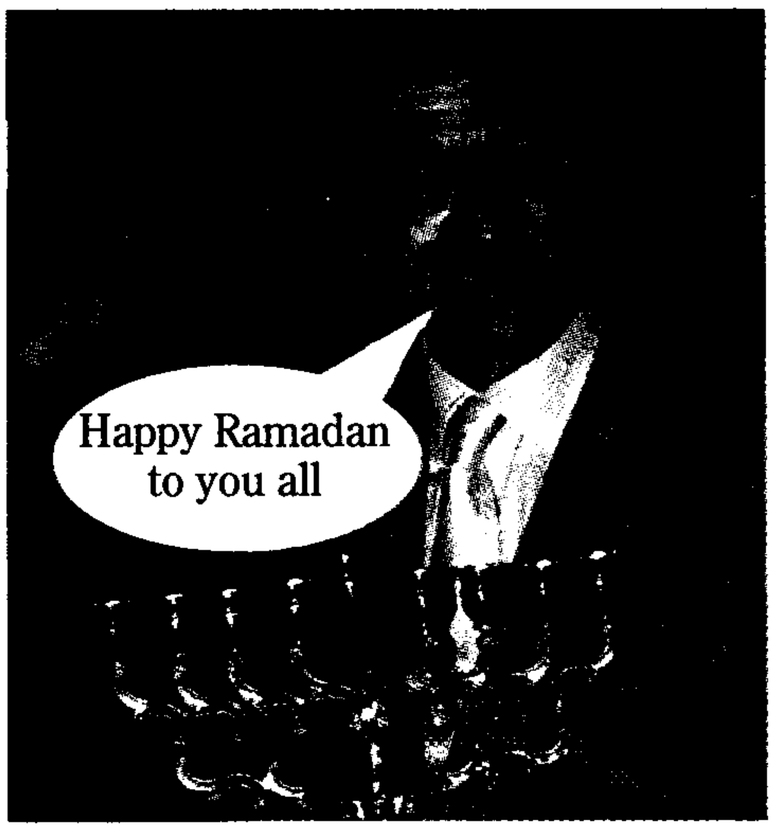
Meanwhile the practical effect of disappearing playing fields continues to be seen across the country. In Norwich, where Earlham High School is waiting to hear if it will be awarded specialist sports status, when a large area of council-owned playing field next door became available, the school had high hopes of being able to expand its facilities.

But no such luck. The land was sold off last month to the University of East Anglia, which is considering putting a school of dentistry on the site. The fields, sold by Norfolk County Council for £1m, belonged to Blackdale Middle School (which is closing as part of the county's phasing out of middle schools). Earlham High had anyway been sharing sports pitches for some time with Blackdale, rather than considering the border as absolute. Local residents had also been campaigning to keep the green space.

Despite this, the council says Earlham has "sufficient grounds" for the foreseeable future and that the sale to UEA means the land will still be in educational use.

Specialist sports status is one way of combating the "diminished importance" of outdoor activities found by Ofsted inspectors in their 2005 review of PE in secondary schools. The review also found that a quarter of schools didn't have enough facilities for proper games lessons. Sadly, Earlham High must count itself lucky to have "sufficient" space while the extra land joins the many hundreds of playing fields lost under "new" Labour since 1997.

KEN MAKES IT UP WITH JEWS



TV

The Miracles of Jesus (Channel 4)

ONE of the biggest problems of television is that an idea which looks fine when it's scribbled on a sheet of paper often doesn't seem so clever when it's coming at you from behind a rectangle of glass. And one of the final shows of 2005 dramatically illustrated this gap between theory and screening.

Channel 4 has always had the problem of how, as a supposedly edgy and separatist channel, to mark the Christmas holiday. The usual method is the alternative Christmas message – it was Jamie Oliver going up against the Queen this year at 3pm on Christmas Day - but Ofcom still expects a bit of religion.

So, hey, like, says a Jeremy or a Jessica back in January, what if, like, we got those magician guys from *Dirty Tricks* to see if they could do JC's miracles? Hey, you know, like feeding a whole crowd with one Filet o'Fish or getting a virgin up the duff. It could be, like, totally random.

And lo it came to pass that there was **The Miracles of Jesus**, in which magical double-act Barry and Stuart whizzed through a series of biblical tricks. A gynaecologist scanned a woman's tummy and saw no baby but, when the scan was repeated after Bazza and Stu had shouted a few spells, a foetus could be seen on the screen of the machine.

At a wedding feast, the crazy pair poured water from a special flask but then, when someone wanted wine, were able to make house white come out of the same spout. Then, in what was supposed to be a mortuary, they pulled back a sheet to show a headless corpse but, when the sheet was next pulled down, the head was restored and the body sat up.

Derren Brown has just about made this kind of illusion work on television by using very wide and varied camera angles in front of a studio audience. But these two use close-ups and cut-aways so that the "misdirection" on which magicians depend is very often merely television direction. For example, the "virgin birth" stunt (where, perhaps thankfully, they didn't actually establish that the mother was a virgin) was presumably done by switching the video-feeds to a foetal monitor.

Similarly, the "raising a man from the dead" miracle will probably have involved trick tables and substitutions under sheets in the manner of the classic sawing a lady in half sketch. And it would have been interesting, wouldn't it?, to have a tight close-up on the hands of B&S during the one where water and wine come out of the same bottle. Fancy picnickers already have a flask which holds both hot and cold liquids and one imagines that this involves something similar.

And, if it doesn't work as magic, it's pointless as religion too. Jeremy Bowen once did an Easter Special for the BBC in which he "proved" that Christ could have been taken down from the cross unconscious but alive and then subsequently been revived and that it has been medically recorded for women to become pregnant with their hymen intact or for men to be certified dead and then recover. This approach at least had some mild virtue in showing how the central tenets of Christianity could have been based on a misunderstanding of events.

Barry and Stuart's debunking, though, is simply useless. You either believe that the Angel Gabriel supernaturally impregnated a young woman or you don't – but not even Richard Dawkins thinks that a doctor in the pay of God pulled a fast one with the pre-natal scans at Galilee General Hospital or that the relatives of Lazarus were fooled by a switch of bodies while their eyes were misdirected. And the reason that the water into wine story resonated for so long was that people at that time wouldn't have thought: oh, he's obviously invented some kind of clever vessel. Still, it must have seemed a good idea at the time.

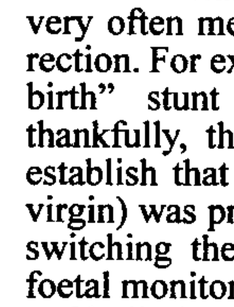
'Remote Controller'

DUMB BRITAIN

NOSTALGIA SPECIAL

Family Fortunes, Challenge TV

Les Dennis: Apart from a guernsey, name an item of clothing named after a place.
Contestant: Kilt.
Second contestant: Beret.
Third contestant: Sandals.
Fourth contestant: Sari.



Les Dennis: Name a TV chef.
Contestant: Rolf Harris.
Second contestant: Mrs Beeton.
Third contestant: My mum.

Les Dennis: Name something associated with Egypt.
Contestant: Cigars.

Les Dennis: Name a game you can play in the bath.
Contestant: Scuba diving.

Les Dennis: Name a part of the body everyone has only one of.
Contestant: Big toe.
Second contestant: Combine harvester.
Third contestant: Wedding tackle.

Les Dennis: Name something you do after a long walk.
Contestant: Rub black pudding on to your feet.

Les Dennis: Name an animal that makes people scream.
Contestant: A squirrel.

MEDIA NEWS

THE BBC's drive to cut waste and duplication across its news networks isn't going well.

While News 24 is so short of hacks it has to spend thousands of pounds a week to hire freelancers to help put material on air, the *Six* and the *Nine* are so overstaffed by comparison that directors are being paid a full salary to work a three-day week.

CHANGES in store for BBC Monitoring, a branch of the World Service that listens in to foreign radio broadcasts and transcribes "material of interest".

Once the responsibility of the Foreign Office, the service will now be controlled by the Cabinet Office in what is seen as a vital intelligence-gathering role.

BACK in August 2004 BBC Director-General Mark Thompson promised bored viewers he would shift the BBC's output away from "tired and derivative reality programmes".

Odd, then, that BBC Three is currently looking for "hopeless housewives" to take part in "a new reality show" with the working title *Perfect Housewives*.

Anthea Turner (perfect in every way) will visit "working women" and "stay-at-home mums" who will be "trained how to be a domestic goddess". Interesting to see how the BBC's Diversity Unit, which is responsible for monitoring such things as "gender portrayal issues", will react to a series devoted to teaching women to wash, cook and clean.

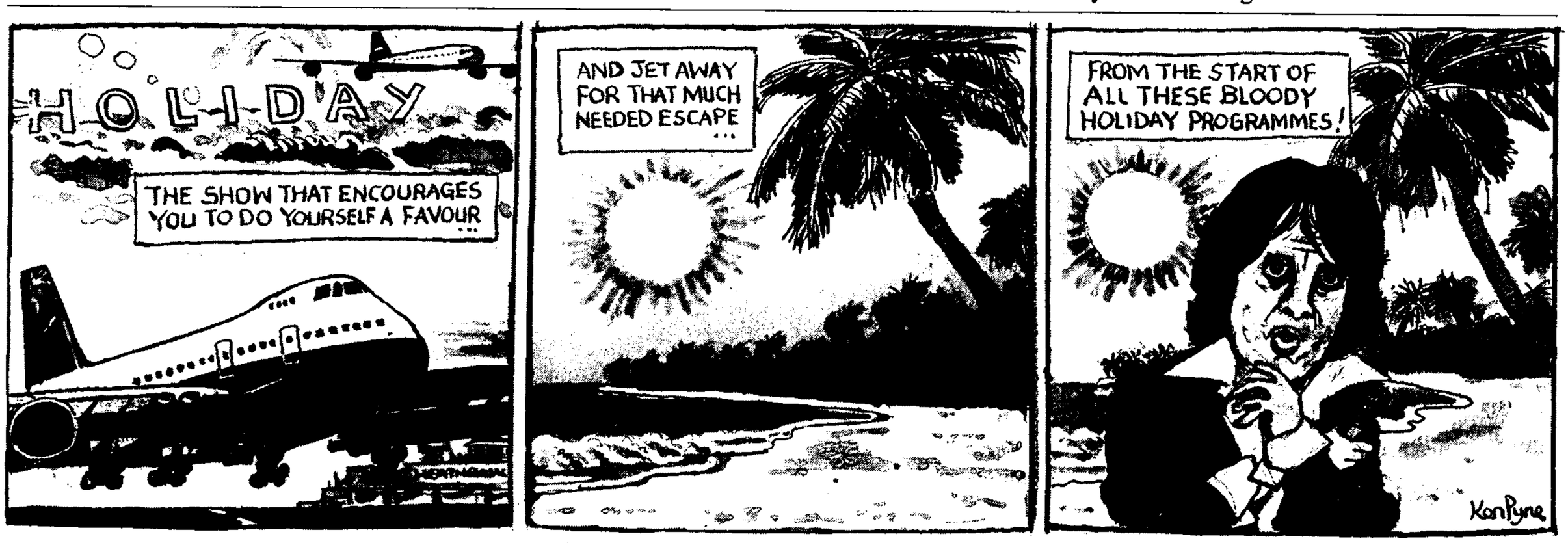
HACKS in the BBC's regional newsrooms have been ordered by Director of Nations and Regions Pat Loughrey to "work harder to find and tell stories that will be memorable". There must be no more "so-called reporting that is entirely based on the PC".

What a shame that thanks to cutbacks many regional outposts will close, making it more difficult for the journalists who survive the recently announced redundancy target of 735 to find any stories to tell at all.

A "communications manager" is quoted by Ariel, the in-house BBC magazine, in a piece about the hordes who turn up at TV Centre to watch programmes being made.

Apparently one way of "encouraging them to experience for themselves how good digital radio is" is for them to get "hands-on" with the sets while they wait in TVC reception.

This has proved a mixed blessing. Visitors routinely retune their radios away from BBC digital channels in favour of commercial channels such as Capital or Magic FM. Security staff have been told to retune them to BBC channels, "when they notice a change".


HOLIDAY
THE SHOW THAT ENCOURAGES YOU TO DO YOURSELF A FAVOUR...
AND JET AWAY FOR THAT MUCH NEEDED ESCAPE...
FROM THE START OF ALL THESE BLOODY HOLIDAY PROGRAMMES!
KonPyne

Strictly weather forecasting

ONE OF the world's biggest companies is being sued by investors who believe that its chief executive, the most famous media mogul in the world, has broken an agreement with them after extending a so-called "poison pill" designed to entrench his family's control from a takeover threat.

Angry shareholders claim that this reneges on an earlier commitment and constitutes corporate misgovernance. The company tried to block the action but four days before Christmas a judge in Delaware ruled that the suit can proceed.

A story for all papers which aspire to serious business coverage, surely? Certainly for the *Independent*, *Evening Standard*, *Guardian* and *Telegraph*, who all followed it up. But not for the *Times*, despite the recent boast from editor Robert Thomson that "business coverage is a true indicator of a newspaper's commitment to quality journalism.

As *Eye* readers will have guessed, the *Times*' spineless decision to ignore the story was of course related to fact that the company was News Corp and the chief executive Rupert Murdoch.

AN ITV MYSTERY STORY

THE few remaining readers of the *Daily Express* (circulation plunged by an impressive 10.25 percent in 2005) may have been bemused by the Hickey column's recent obsession with one John Whiston, an ITV executive who has hitherto not featured heavily in the gossip columns.

"It looks like a bleak mid-winter for John Whiston, the beleaguered new head of ITV productions," thundered Hickey on 19 December. "Not only is the rather grey man facing the indignity of falling audience shares, but he's also been getting the cold shoulder after one of the station's jewels, *Emmerdale* star Patsy Kensit, jumped ship for the BBC… An ITV insider said 'Patsy's gone off to the medical drama *Holby City* on Whiston's watch and he should have kept her in play. It's not being looked on very kindly by those in the know. Someone joked it should be Whiston in *Casualty*, not Patsy."

Undeterred by the fact that Kensit announced her departure from the soap *before* Whiston's new job was announced, the column managed two days later to blame him for the demise of part of the business with which he has never been involved. "Hickey wouldn't be surprised if John Whiston gets visited by the ghosts of Christmas past, present and future," it sniffed on 21 December. "Morale at the station is at an all-time low with 70 employees facing a jobless New Year following the closure of the ITV News Channel… 'We could not attract enough viewers,' says a demoralised ITV insider."

Could this peculiar obsession be in any way connected to Whiston's quip in his speech at the ***What the Papers Say Awards*** on 16 December, where he asked "what's the newspaper equivalent of haemorrhaging viewers? Oh yes, the ***Express***", to much laughter from the assembled hacks?

In a blistering rant after the ceremony, *Express* editor Peter "Mentally" Hill screamed at the hapless exec that he would never feature any of ITV's programmes in his paper again.

HIGH PRINCIPALS

NEWS of how far some cash-strapped British universities are prepared to go to turn a buck comes from Brighton, where the University of Sussex has handed over the teaching of foundation courses to… the *Daily Mail*.

Sussex isn't offering a BA in Working Mother and House Price Studies – well, not yet anyway. But it has done a deal with Study Group International (SGI), a private education company wholly owned by the Daily Mail and General Trust, to teach foundation courses at a new centre on the university's main campus.

The deal, which comes into effect next September, cuts out local colleges, such as Sussex Downs in Lewes, which had previously prepared overseas students for full entry to Sussex. The university, currently some £4m in the red, hopes that teaching foundation courses on campus will result in more overseas students staying on to do full degrees – and paying a juicy £12,000 a head a year in tuition fees.

Lecturers are worried because SGI will recruit and pay its own, non-union staff. Both staff and students – *Grauniad* readers to a non gender-specific person – are aghast that the new deal is with a company owned by the hated *Mail*, which until recently was banned from the student union.

No doubt they will see sense, however, when the first proud students graduate with their degrees in Why Oh Why studies…

"I'm afraid I panic bought"

HISTORY TODAY

WHY George is a more suitable royal title than Charles…

George I = Marriage was dissolved following adultery on both sides – and widely believed to have ordered murder of wife's lover

George II = Intensely disliked by his own father

George III = Mad – and irritated government by interfering in matters he knew nothing about

George IV = Illegally married his mistress

George V = Changed name in desperate attempt to make himself more popular

LUVVIES

"But with the pantomime you can bring the book onto the stage and you can share it with the audience. To do Hook properly requires the skill needed to do King Lear. I am not going to make it look like King Lear but it requires great technique and style. I find it as challenging as doing Othello or King Lear.

BRIAN BLESSED
East Anglian Daily Times

Submitted by Dave Love.

"I decided to dispense with any goat-like ticks and really find the character. Tumnis [a faun in *Narnia*] is a deeply conflicted character, patriotic but struggling to cope with living in a war situation, just as we are now with this war going on in Iraq."

JAMES McAVOY

Submitted by Jane Kelly.

MAN IN THE EYE

MARTIN CRUDDACE

A FEW years ago three chums at the *Daily Mirror* clubbed together to buy a share in a racehorse called Ledham. They were Piers "Morgan" Moron, James Hipwell and Martin Cruddace, the lawyer responsible for checking Hipwell's "City Slickers" column.

Hipwell is now a convicted criminal. Moron is thoroughly disgraced. But what of Cruddace's reputation?

During the recent trial it emerged that by the end of 1999 – before the Viglen shares scandal – Trinity Mirror chief executive Philip Graf was already worried about the *Mirror*'s financial tipsters. He raised the issue with group legal director Paul Vickers, who in turn asked Cruddace to investigate. On 12 January 2000, Cruddace wrote to Vickers that "the evidence appears to exonerate the Slickers from any allegation of ramping", having accepted the hacks' assurance that they only bought shares *after* tipping them. He added that share ramping was "an immoral and unethical practice, especially for financial journalists", but could find no evidence that the Slickers did anything of the kind.

Whoops! This was a mere five days before Moron, Hipwell and many other *Mirror* staff "piled in" to Viglen shares on the eve of a Slickers' column tipping them. Soon afterwards the Department of Trade and Industry wrote to the *Mirror* expressing its concern that several of the Slickers' columns might be in breach of the 1986 Financial Services Act. Once again Cruddace used his full legal authority to offer blithe reassurance: though the column might be "unusual for a tabloid newspaper", he told the DTI, it was "a legitimate form of journalism". But he neglected to mention that he himself had bought shares in three separate companies just before they were tipped by the Slickers, and persuaded his girlfriend, his mother and his girlfriend's father to invest as well. But then why should he mention it? As we noted in the last *Eye*, Cruddace insists that all these share-purchases were pure "coincidence".

Cruddace left the *Mirror* in 2001 to join the solicitors' practice run by Keith "Rottweiler" Schilling. Here too he was soon getting into scrapes – and earned himself a stern judicial rebuke in a hitherto unnoticed judgment from 2003, when acting for the steel company Istil against one of its own directors, Mohammad Zahoor. Mr Justice Lawrence Collins was shocked to learn that Cruddace had failed to disclose a crucial forged document in his possession which might have assisted the defence, and in his draft judgment, circulated on 10 February 2003, he made "adverse findings concerning the honesty of the conduct of the claimants and their solicitor Mr Cruddace in the way in which they put [documents] in evidence". In short, the judge felt he had acted dishonestly.

This led to much urgent pleading from Ian Mill QC on behalf of Cruddace and the claimants. "Mr Mill… accepts that the court is entitled to conclude that Mr Cruddace made a serious misjudgement in not disclosing the [document], but denies dishonesty," Collins observed. "This is a case where there has on any view been a forgery, and where there was a deliberate decision not to adduce evidence in a context which made the evidence which was put forward misleading." Although the judge agreed to tone down his previous finding that "there was a deliberate attempt to mislead the court", he nevertheless did find that the decision not to disclose the document was indeed "deliberate" – and wrong. He added that he thought Cruddace's conduct "extraordinary" for a solicitor.

Cruddace has since moved on again. He is now company secretary and legal director of the online gambling firm Betfair. Where better for such a born chancer?

SIGNAL FAILURES

Snow joke

BIG subsidies don't guarantee more than a part-time service from Britain's rail industry, as thousands of passengers found last week.

Network Rail had months to prepare for a colder winter than usual, and forecasters accurately predicted the areas that would be worst affected after Christmas. "If heavy snow does come we are pretty well prepared, and if it is 10ft high in some places we have two snowblowers that can deal with it," NR's weather strategy specialist Steve Scott told industry newspaper *Railnews* as long ago as November.

The snow wasn't nearly 10ft high in Kent, but trains to London were still cancelled or delayed by "severe weather" over the three working weekdays between Christmas and New Year. Elsewhere a spate of infrastructure failures, including several on the London-Scotland mainlines, caused long delays and forced some passengers on to buses which were then delayed by snow and ice on the roads.

That was just the unplanned stuff. NR shut down bits of the network because it couldn't be bothered to keep a track open past maintenance sites (which would require additional safety management to protect engineers). There were no trains at all in most areas on Christmas or Boxing day, although Boxing day is now the established start of "January sales". The Tyne & Wear Metro prolonged festivities with a reduced service for Newcastle commuters working as normal from 28 to 30 December, while One West Anglia (Cambridge-London) was all at sea because of "driver shortages".

VIRGIN Trains chief Tony Collins is confident Virgin can compete with airlines on the London-Glasgow route now that its Pendolino trains can reach 125mph between Crewe and Glasgow. "Obviously, you can turn up and go on a train," he told the *Today* programme.

There may be no check-in procedure for intercity trains, but Virgin, GNER and others have worked hard to make "turn up and go" less and less practical for people of average means, having abolished British Rail's popular Supersaver ticket.

They couldn't axe its cousin, the Saver, because Savers were protected and price-capped in the 1993 Rail Privatisation Act (to placate MPs worried that private firms would increase fares rapidly). But the Tories weren't serious about regulating Savers, and left franchisees free to define their validity. Hence Virgin and others greatly increased restrictions on when Savers could be used (*Eye* 963, November 1998). Now the government is reportedly considering deregulating Savers altogether, to, er... help train companies increase fares rapidly.

They have already raised unregulated fares way ahead of inflation, answering critics by pointing to cut-price tickets for people who can book ahead and restrict themselves to specific trains. Many people on essential journeys can't book ahead or predict the trains they'll need and have been forced off the trains, mainly into cars (which really do remain "turn up and go"). But their displacement is masked by book-ahead tickets generating non-essential journeys – people travelling because they can get hold of relatively cheap tickets. The net effect is more pollution and congestion on the roads. Which is not what Richard Branson led us to expect in 1998 when he said his trains would attract so many motorists "we can grass over the motorways".

As of 2 January, Virgin's Glasgow-London standard open return, valid on any train, costs £222. That's a 64 percent rise since Virgin took over in 1997, about three times greater than general retail inflation. A Supersaver in 1997 cost £64. British Airways' cheapest Glasgow-London fare is now £35, the same as Virgin's cheapest book-ahead fare; and many will decide they might as well fly if they have to book ahead to go by train at an affordable price.

None of this will help Britain cut its greenhouse gas emissions, but global warming is unlikely to figure in the government's money-driven deliberations on the future of Savers.

THE original rail franchise deals were accompanied by multiple promises of jam tomorrow. But after so many franchises failed to cut delays, officials are no longer willing to promise better punctuality.

When the Transport Department announced that FirstGroup had won the Thameslink and Greater Western franchises last month, it said: "On both franchises FirstGroup expects to deliver continuous improvement in service performance." On Greater Western, punctuality "should reach 90% by 2011/12".

It has good reason to be wary after entrusting so much to FirstGroup, whose motto could be "first for delays". A punctuality bulletin published before Christmas divides the rail network into three groups: intercity, where First Great Western was the least punctual in July-September; London and the south east, where First Great Western Link was the least punctual; and regional, where the least punctual franchise was TPE... better known as First TransPennine Express.

Greater Western will merge intercity, commuter and local services. It was inspired by the One East Anglia franchise, where combined intercity, commuter and local services were handed to National Express in April 2004. The new figures show delays on One have worsened since the franchise's first year (while most other franchises improved). But frustrated passengers can't throw that back at government officials – who had too little faith in their chosen franchisee to promise fewer delays. The best they could offer was: "This deal should... bring about an overall improvement in punctuality".

PS: The new figures don't cover the chaos on One after new timetables began last month. The company blamed "transitional problems" (ie pisspoor management) and train drivers refusing to work overtime to help National Express (whose chief executive, Phil White, takes home about £1m a year) out of a hole. Franchise boss Tim Clarke has been replaced "to strengthen the management team", while passengers endure "short-term cancellations and service alterations".

'Dr B. Ching'

DOING THE ROUNDS

"THE NHS is not being turned into a market, but a modern public service," says Health Secretary Patsy Hewitt. The 14 primary care trusts (PCTs) in Manchester might beg to differ, after being forced to shell out £1.9m to South African company Netcare for running an independent treatment centre (ITC).

Even though the ITC only managed to perform 4,000 of the 6,000 operations it was contracted to do, the terms of the contract meant the PCTs had to pay for all the "unused activity".

Netcare argues that it would have done the work if it had received sufficient referrals; but in the new "patient-led NHS", people are supposed to be able to choose where they go for treatment, and if they prefer to go to an established NHS hospital rather than an ITC there isn't much the PCTs can do.

Or is there? As John Critchley, director of finance and performance development at Oldham PCT, put it: "We need to encourage as many patients as we can to use the centre... There will be a ramping up of activity." As with other underused ITC projects, it seems unwitting patients will be funnelled away from the NHS, whether they choose to be or not.

Patient choice also seems to be in decline for those opting for a single-handed GP. Small practices deliver more continuity and patient satisfaction than the larger super surgeries favoured by "new" Labour and score as well, if not better, in the government's Quality and Outcomes Framework. However, PCTs are being instructed to force their closure or merger wherever possible. When single-handed GP Dr Pain announced his retirement from Hoppit Surgery in Danbury, Maldon and South Chelmsford PCT launched a patient consultation and discovered that 95 percent of respondents did not want the surgery to merge. The PCT board voted unanimously to recruit a new single-handed GP, Dr Hunt.

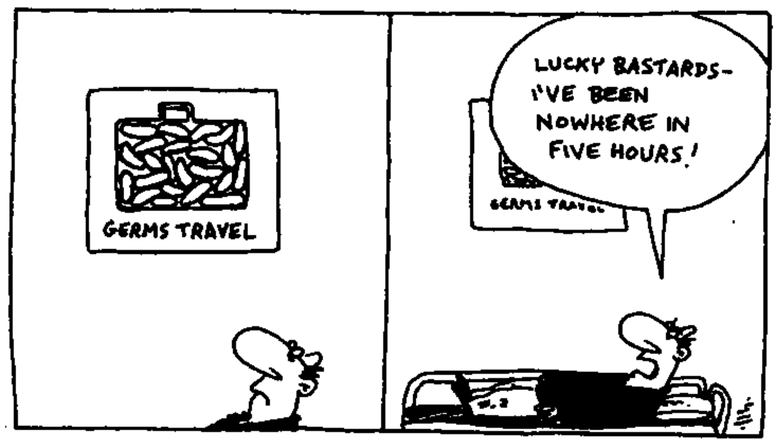
Alas, soon after his appointment in April 2005, plans to "share premises" with the neighbouring Lee House practice (7 doctors, 10,000 patients) were announced and in October, patients were given less than a month's notice that Hoppit surgery would close, with 2,000 patients transferred to a larger practice with no further consultation or additional facilities to cope with the influx. As with the rest of the NHS, it seems that patients are free to choose whatever they wish, provided it is what the government has chosen for them.

And it's not just patients who are unimpressed. Professor Chris Ham, former head of the Department of Health's strategy unit, has now decided the health reforms are "incoherent and dangerously out of sync... And it is not clear whether the government is willing to live with the consequences of the creative destruction it has unleashed on the NHS."

The Department of Health's response has been to invite management consultants from McKinsey into the DoH to decide, at huge public expense, if it has the right "skill set." "It is a no holds barred, top downwards look at the top team to see if they are fit for the future." Don't hold your breath.

M.D.

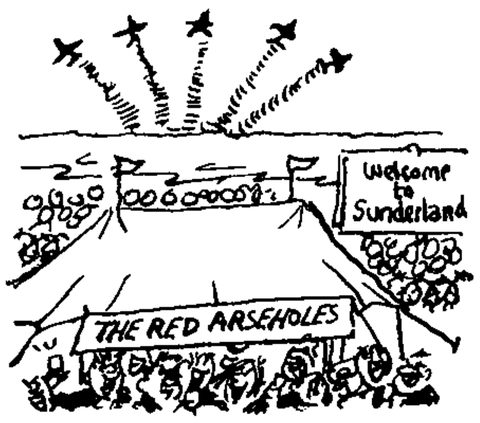
off your trolley REEVE & WAY



ROTTEN BOROUGHS AWARDS 2005

YES: it's that time of year again! The Rotten Boroughs Awards, the most coveted of the glittering prizes available to those working in local government, were held this year in the Poulson Suite at the new Prescott Soccerama Dome and Retail Park, Sussex (formerly "the South Downs"). They were attended by hundreds of councillors and their civil partners, without respect to race, faith, gender, honesty or competence. And the winners were…

Piss-up of the Year



THE all-day free bar enjoyed by councillors and their guests at the **Sunderland** International Air Show in July, while ordinary members of the public were denied any drinks at all, the city council having declared the main seafront viewing area an alcohol-free zone.

For Services to the Environment

LAMBETH council and its refuse contractor Cleanaway, whose binmen were caught more than once chucking residents' carefully separated recycling into the crusher with the rest of the garbage destined for landfill.

Cnuts of the Year

CONSERVATIVE **Scarborough** Borough Council, which went £14m over budget on a sea defences scheme, illegally hired a firm of engineers without putting the job out to tender and then fiddled paperwork to cover up irregularities. When the scandal was exposed by the Audit Commission, council leader **Eileen Bosomworth** promised a full and frank public inquiry – which was scrapped after a week. A respected local government consultant was then brought in to find out what went wrong. This he duly did – and the result was so embarrassing that Mrs B has sat on it ever since.

Money Well-Spent Award

THE $100,000 (£54,736.02) of taxpayers' dosh paid to former New York mayor **Rudolph Giuliani** for making the "keynote" speech at the **Local Government Association** conference in July.

Brass-necked Councillor of the Year

RUNNER-up: **Keith Fitchett**, Lib-Dem "executive member" for housing at **Lambeth** council, under whose watch a temporary member of staff took the council for almost £3m by paying himself for non-existent central heating systems. Fitchett refused to resign, so was relieved of his powers. Colleagues softened the blow by allowing him to keep his £15,000 a year "special allowance" for the job he was no longer doing.

Joint winners: **Hull** Labour councillors **John and Betty Hewitt**, who felt it was appropriate to continue to sit on the council's "Health and Social Well-Being Overview and Scrutiny Commission", the body responsible for overseeing the council's homes for the handicapped, despite having failed to ensure the well-being of residents at a home who were systematically abused by carers. Especially as two of the "carers" jailed for their part in the abuse were the Hewitts' own son and daughter, Edward and Jackie.

Spooky Family Connections of the Year

EYE 1146 told how **Tower Hamlets** council press officer **Eileen Short**, who is facing the sack in a bogus review process because she campaigns in her spare time against council house privatisation, happens to be the sister of former Labour minister **Clare Short**. But Eileen is not the only Tower Hamlets employee to be related to a minister. Chief executive **Christine Gilbert** happens to be married to home office minister **Tony McNulty**, previously a housing minister responsible for encouraging the ill-thought-out sell-offs that Ms Short is campaigning against. Just fancy that!

Blue-Sky Thinking Award

THIS year's runaway winner is **Somerset** County Council chief executive **Alan Jones**, for his prolix round robins to staff ("Sent from my Blackberry Wireless Handheld"). The judges particularly admired the way he illustrated some turgid stuff about "local area agreements" with a comparison to Michelangelo's vision of a finished sculpture trapped within the raw marble – which, when you think about it, *is* rather like negotiating a shortlist of priorities with the Government Office for the South-west.

Smooth Transition of the Year

WHEN **Darryl Stephenson**, aka "the barrow boy from Hull", retired as chief executive of **East Riding of Yorkshire** council in September, on a pension worth about £100,000 a year, he was replaced as £150,000 chief exec by Nigel Pearson, the council's former "director of corporate resources". Mr Pearson's £100,000+ replacement was Sue Lockwood, the council's former head of legal. Mr Pearson happens to be Mr Stephenson's very good mate; Ms Lockwood happens to be Mr Stephenson's very good wife.

For Defying Terror

TWO Labour councillors **Terry Wade** and **Val Rush**, who took up **Barking & Dagenham** council's offer of free minicab travel to central London for councillors nervous about going by tube following the July bombings.

Payoff of the Year

CHIEF executive **Faith Boardman** departed from **Lambeth** council with a nice little package. She drew her £180,000 salary for five months after her last day of actual work, received a lump sum of £220,000 on departure, and a pension of £74,000 for the rest of her life. The only thing she didn't get her way on was a payment of £100,000 for "hurt feelings" at getting the chop.

Communicators of the Year

STRATFORD-on-Avon council, which spent £9,000 on a mailshot to residents informing them of Christmas 2004 office opening hours, refuse collections, etc… and posted it at the end of January 2005.

Pathetic Excuse of the Year

WHEN it was discovered that a braille sculpture (of a quote from Shakespeare) commissioned for £10,000 by **Camden** council had mis-spelled the bard's name (as "Willim") the council's spokeswoman explained that "the work is just inspired by braille, but it's not intended to be read as braille", even though the rest of it contained no errors.

QUOTE OF THE YEAR

"I will not respond to anything in that newspaper… I consider it a badge of honour to be featured in Private Eye." – London borough of **Richmond** council leader **Tony "Pants on Fire" Arbour**.

Scrapped Contract of the Year

IN 2001 **Bedfordshire** County Council signed a 12-year contract, worth £267m, with Hyder Business Services (HBS) in which HBS would take over admin services and 550 staff. At the time the Tory leader of the council, **Madeline Russell**, said the contract was "a fine example of Strategic Services Delivery Partnership". Four years later, announcing the premature termination of the contract, Russell declared: "The ending of the contract is a critical step in our drive to transform Bedfordshire". So thoroughly was BCC dumped on that it paid HBS £7.7m for the privilege of terminating the contract.

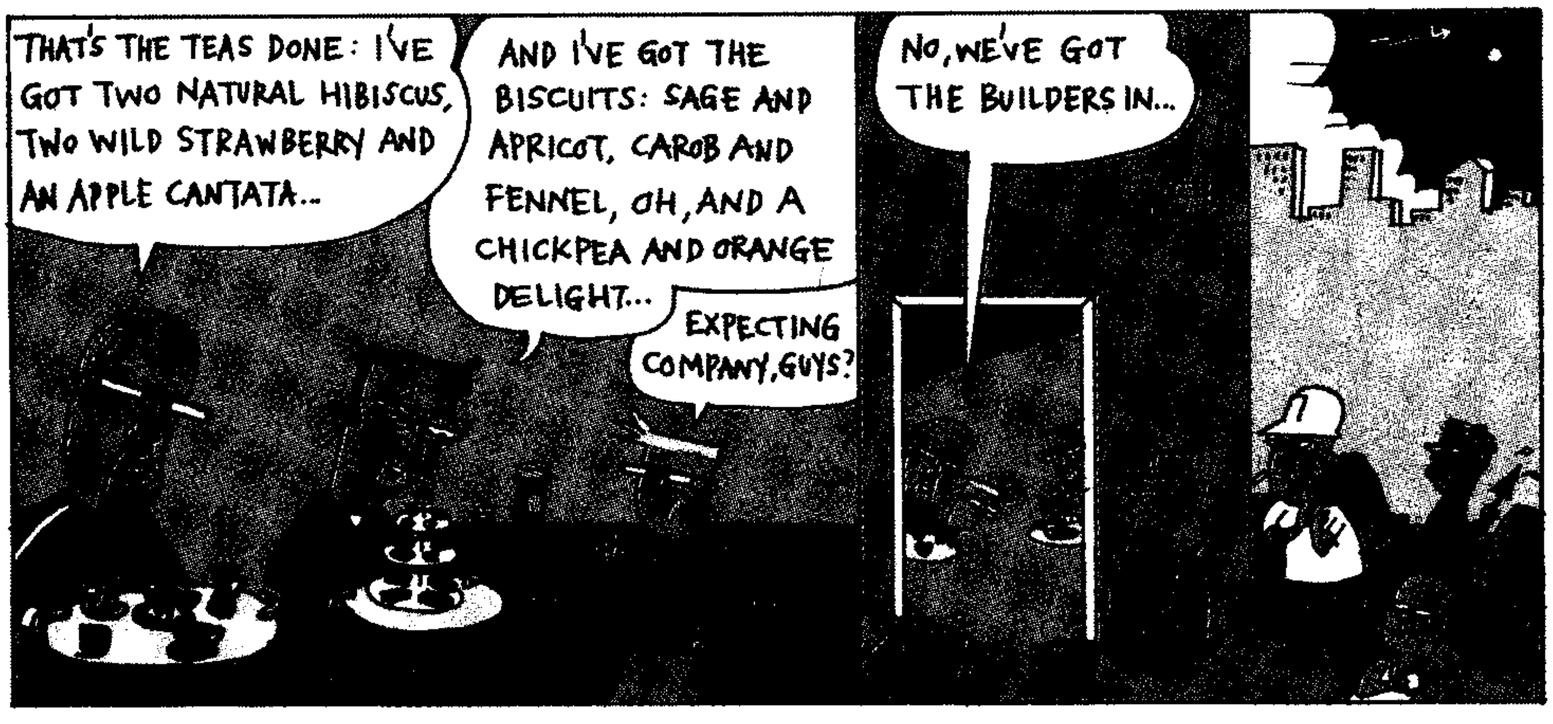
Newspeak Award

THANKS to Hyder Business Services (again), "outsourcing" partner of **Milton Keynes**, **Middlesbrough** and other councils, which has introduced the pleasant-sounding phrase "Job Enrichment" to the language. It actually means being forced to take on extra work to avoid having your pay cut.

Council Slogan of the Year

"WIRRAL has heard the cry of the Earth."

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON KNIFE & PACKER


THAT'S THE TEAS DONE: I'VE GOT TWO NATURAL HIBISCUS, TWO WILD STRAWBERRY AND AN APPLE CANTATA...
AND I'VE GOT THE BISCUITS: SAGE AND APRICOT, CAROB AND FENNEL, OH, AND A CHICKPEA AND ORANGE DELIGHT...
EXPECTING COMPANY, GUYS?
NO, WE'VE GOT THE BUILDERS IN...

Down on the Farm

A LATE contender for the dottiest piece of journalism in 2005 was a piece which appeared in the *Times* just before Christmas by Lord Hattersley.

In what appeared to be a world exclusive headed "A cull by royal appointment", Hattersley revealed that Defra had been single-handedly talked into slaughtering tens of thousands of badgers by no less a personage than the Prince of Wales.

It is true that Defra appears to have rethought its previous refusal to allow the killing of diseased badgers as a means to ending the epidemic of TB in Britain's cattle. It has announced that it may next year allow a badger cull after all. But only Lord Hattersley was bold enough to disclose that this U-turn was due entirely to Prince Charles.

So startling was this charge that one looked carefully for the evidence. The only sources Hatters could cite for his claim were unnamed "dissidents within the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs", and one Rosie Woodroffe, a member of Defra's Independent Scientific Group on Cattle TB. Apparently these experts were horrified by Defra's decision, flying in the face of the scientific findings that culling badgers only results in spreading TB, and they had "no doubt" who was behind it: "the heir apparent".

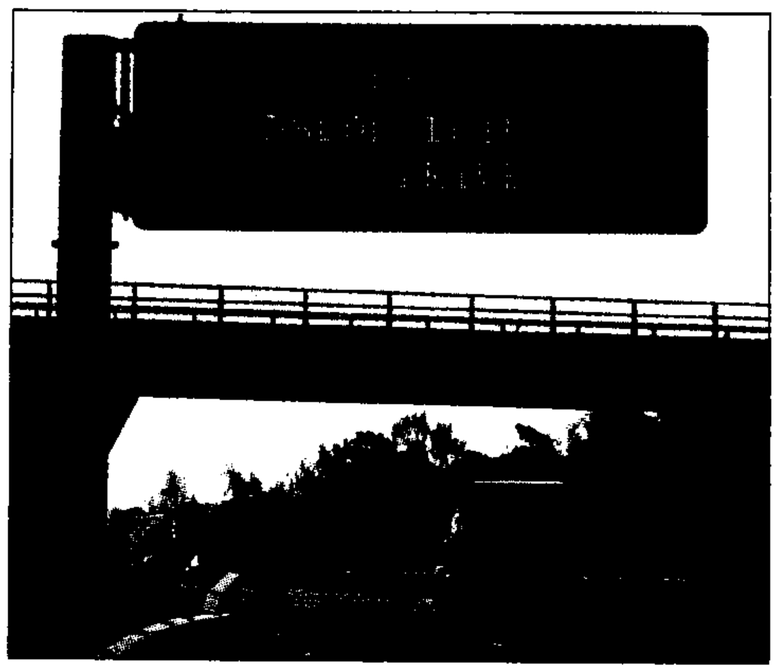
This inevitably provoked speculation as to how the heir to the throne came to exercise such influence. Was little Ben Bradshaw, the minister in charge of animal welfare and conservation, summoned to Highgrove for a stern lecture and ordered to put his policy into reverse? Did the heir to the throne make repeated calls to "Baby Ben's" boss, Mrs Beckett (aka Rosa Klebb), in the small hours, disturbing her slumbers so persistently that her resistance finally cracked?

Somehow one suspects the process which led to the government's U-turn was more complex than that great countryman Lord H. let on. It seems to have escaped his attention that, as the Treasury is keenly aware, the cost to taxpayers of the TB epidemic is now rapidly heading for £2bn. Second, the evidence quoted to Lord Hattersley by his "dissidents" was only that derived from the ministry's own notoriously inefficient "Krebs trials". Much more reliable is the Irish evidence that a properly designed cull can cut TB in cattle by as much as 96 percent.

What Hatters further omitted to mention was the force of that letter signed by more than 420 vets and scientists (originally suggested by Tory agriculture spokesman Owen Paterson), calling on the government to allow a cull as a matter of highest urgency. Not only, they argued, was this the only way to save thousands of farmers and their cattle from disaster. It would also serve the welfare of the diseased badgers themselves, condemned otherwise to a lingering, unpleasant death. So pitifully ill-informed was the *Times*'s bizarre contribution to the debate, it is perhaps no surprise that the paper declined to print any of the letters sent in to point this out.

'Muckspreader'

I-SPY *M6 near Carlisle*



Submitted by Pieter Rol. £10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs)*

NOOKS and CORNERS

THE Sir Hugh Casson Medal for the worst building of the last year goes to a large and prominent structure which has appeared in the very heart of London and which aspires to be taken seriously as monumental architecture and yet fails so lamentably that it deserves notice.

It is the Women of World War II Memorial which has been plonked in the centre of Whitehall and which was unveiled last July. A memorial to the women who helped win the Second World War was first proposed for Whitehall Gardens in front of the old Air Ministry. Designed by the sculptor John W. Mills, this was to be festooned with uniforms on clothes pegs (to symbolise the many tasks performed by women) and surmounted by a sculptured group depicting a female air raid warden sheltering two children under her coat. Somehow, however, this managed to migrate to the middle of Whitehall, shedding the superincumbent group in the process. What we now have is a 22ft-high bronze pylon (designed by Giles Quarme) with those coats and hats hung on its tapering sides. The inspiration for the general form is clear: the Cenotaph, that austere, subtly modelled and beautiful white pylon which stands a little further down Whitehall.

Now to criticise this object is not to question its thoroughly worthy aim. No; the objection to it is simply that it is so crude and inept.

The main problem with the Women of World War II Memorial is not the brutal simplicity of the pylon shape but those hats and coats. Not only are they coarsely modelled, but they are not intelligently stylised so as to become integrated into a convincing artistic conception. Worse, they undermine any power the pylon might have in silhouette. Seen from a distance, the memorial becomes an incoherent dark lump, formless and inelegant. As for the lettering on the memorial – mechanical and stridently vertical – it is more worthy of, say, a branch of the Chase Manhattan Bank.

This embarrassing and obtrusive object, which challenges the solemn dignity of the Cenotaph and spoils the character of Whitehall, seems to have been perpetrated through political pressure, chiefly exercised by the former Speaker of the Commons, Betty Boothroyd. Nobody seems to have dared to oppose the proposal – neither the National Heritage Memorial Fund (which helped pay for it), nor Westminster City Council, which granted planning and listed building consent.

'Piloti'

MUSIC & MUSICIANS

NOT MUCH goodwill at English National Opera last month, where a distinctly dismal Christmas was enjoyed by everyone involved as the wretched company staggered through the aftermath of yet another management massacre.

Sean Doran, the ex-chief executive (sacked), was still haggling over his severance pay and trying to maintain a semblance of dignity with the fiction that he remains engaged as a "consultant" – though he has no plans to come within spitting distance of St Martin's Lane for the foreseeable future.

Martin Smith, the ex-chairman who sacked Doran (and was then forced to fall on his own sword as a consequence) was busy sending bitterly apocalyptic emails to all and sundry, claiming he was the innocent victim of a hate campaign in the media and that sooner or later the Truth Would Out.

John Berry and Loretta Tomasi (hastily appointed by Smith as Doran's joint-successors) were wondering if their jobs would survive into the new year after public denouncements of the covert way the appointments had been made and, above all, the chilly response of Arts Council England to a process which, in the words of the ACE chairman, "sidestepped best practice".

Oleg Caetani, the nonentity appointed by Doran to take over as music director in 2006, was (with good reason) making anxious phone calls to the ENO board to find out if he was still invited. Which he wasn't.

Meanwhile, some 200 of the ENO production staff who belong to the union Bectu were threatening to close the house in January after a unanimous vote for strike action over unsettled pay claims.

As this is the pantomime season, it's only appropriate that such merry farce should be accompanied by robust exchanges in the press as to whether ENO happens also to be on the brink of bankruptcy (again). Oh no it isn't. Oh yes it is. But what isn't funny is that this particular panto is costing £16m a year in public money to finance, together with an additional £20m paid over under the Arts Council's ongoing "stabilisation" programme.

Not surprisingly the failure of ENO to manage itself properly (or at all) has played into the hands of those in parliament who never like the idea of arts-spending at the best of times. Why, they ask, are we throwing so much money at a company in such lamentable disarray? Why do we need a second opera house in London? Wouldn't it be better to merge the two? These are old questions but ENO's shambolic mess is getting ever harder to defend.

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH

I'll give up smoking.
I'll cut down on my drinking.
NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS
And I'll stop making pointless, intellectually barren installations.
Only joking!

EU-phemisms

My country's used up its fish stocks – now we want yours

BRUSSELS SPROUTS

SLOVAKIA'S EU funding watchdogs are boycotting the committees on which they serve claiming that they are being "systematically ignored" in the process of deciding how €10bn (£6.8bn) of EU funding should be spent between 2007 and 2013.

In 2001 the Slovak Centre for Environmental Public Advocacy (CEPA) uncovered a corruption scandal involving the steering of pre-accession funds to particular companies. A senior official was fired, €106m of EU funding was frozen and deputy Prime Minister Pavol Hamžik had to resign. Investigations later ruled out embezzlement but found that "non-transparency, favouritism and conflict of interests" had affected the dishing out of contracts involving the funds.

Since then Slovakia's leading non-governmental organisations (covering environmental, social and regional development, heritage protection, minorities, youth and disability organisations) have formed a watchdog whose members serve on the various programming and monitoring committees for EU funds in the country. Their position is strengthened by the "partnership principle", enshrined in EU cohesion policy regulations, which is supposed to ensure NGOs are involved in deciding and monitoring how and where EU money is spent.

But the NGOs say that all their attempts to comment on the country's National Strategic Reference Framework 2007-2013 (the spending plan for the €10bn Slovakia can expect from the EU) have been completely ignored. Requests for further information or explanations about decisions were disregarded. They were frequently given only five days to submit comments on complex documents. And those comments – such as attempts to point out that the draft framework as it stands actually fails to mention public transport at all – have had no impact on the plan anyway.

In December the NGOs decided to pull their members out of national bodies like the Committee for Structural Funds and the Cohesion Fund, saying their continued presence would only serve to legitimise a sham process.

Juraj Zamkovský of CEPA told the *Eye* that the boycott will continue until they see the next version of the Framework, due to be released for discussion in late February. How many other NGOs across Europe are prepared to follow the Slovakians' example and leap off the gravy train in order to demand proper transparency and consultation?

10.00 Danniella Westbrook: EastEnders, Drugs and My New Nose. See Pick of the Day. (S) (T) (36855073)

Daily Telegraph

Letters

Private Eye

Oil wrong

Sir,

Rebuilding Iraq: "I'm oil right Jack". (Eye 1147)

As one of the independent government advisors named, I feel obliged to comment on this rather ill informed and somewhat biased article.

Much was made of FCO support for the US private sector report by ITIC on Production Sharing Contracts (PSAs) that is supposedly being used to pressure the Iraq oil sector to act against their national interests. The reality is somewhat different. In late 2003 the FCO and the US State Department through the CPA Baghdad commissioned the US energy consultants Bearing Point to prepare a comprehensive two volume reference report for the Iraq Ministry of Oil entitled "Options for Developing a Long Term Sustainable Iraqi Oil Industry".

I led this review. The clear instruction from both Washington and London was "Iraq oil for Iraqis". The report was to identify the full range of international oil contract options open to the Iraqis, not just PSAs, without external preferences being expressed.

At the same time your claim that PSAs had not been used in the Middle East was factually incorrect. The Iraq oil sector had awarded PSAs for foreign investment for more than a decade. The depth and expertise of the Iraq oil industry should never be underestimated. They are more than competent to direct their own destiny. Your claim that the FCO internal document on transparency and good governance in the Iraq oil sector (that I also wrote) extensively referred to the ITIC report was misplaced. Surely one three line paragraph in a 15 page document hardly qualifies?

Finally Bob Morgan and I were ex-BP employees. We had been independent energy consultants for some time. However we both felt that to support the early rehabilitation of the Iraq oil sector was a worthy cause. Without economic renewal based on oil, Iraq's social stability would continue to remain at risk. In the event Bob Morgan lost his life in Baghdad in pursuit of this objective.

Yours faithfully,
DR T D ADAMS,

Cley, Norfolk.

Baath time

Sir,

Eye 1148 quotes the Foreign Office's self-serving and entirely misleading description of the Shia "uprising of March 1991 after the Gulf conflict" as having "played into Saddam's hands". In The Back, usually brilliantly forensic and damning in their reporting, have made an egregious error by allowing this convenient retelling of post-war Iraq to go unchallenged.

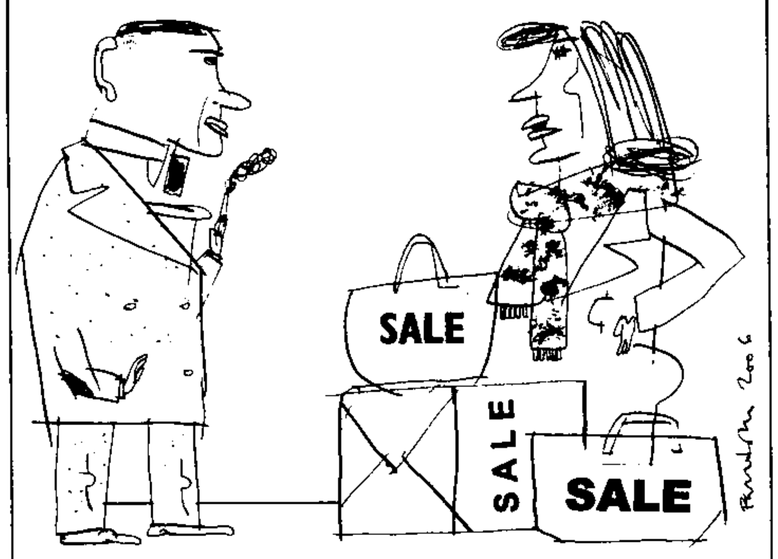
The "uprising", which was on the verge of overthrowing Saddam Hussein's tyranny, was stymied by the US (and UK, though that it is a distinction without a difference) when it ensured the Baathist regime's survival by allowing Saddam's forces access to confiscated helicopters to crush the rebels. That is, the US intervened to save the Baathist despotism after the Gulf War, something pro-war commentators and politicians would rather we forget. This is not even contested. So "Saddam's hands" were in fact tied until we untied them and allowed them to butcher the rebels. The US was remarkably honest in declaring quite openly that it wanted the end of Saddam, not the tyranny, which they were quite keen on.

This, in turn, conclusively proves the one unmentionable fact about the war: outside military force was not necessary to overthrow Saddam Hussein's tyranny, which the US and UK knew all along to be free of WMD – see Colin Powell's and Condoleezza Rice's pre-war assurances that Iraq had deteriorated so much as a military power that it was now incapable of projecting even conventional power, let alone unconventional (WMD) power. We are thus left with a most uncomfortable truth: the war on Iraq was, or is being, conducted for reasons other than the official ones. Get your game together, chaps, or I'll end up having to cancel my subscription!

Merry Christmas and a
Happy New Year,
T CHAHBOUNE.

Via email.

Scenes You Seldom See



"I got lots of things I actually wanted"

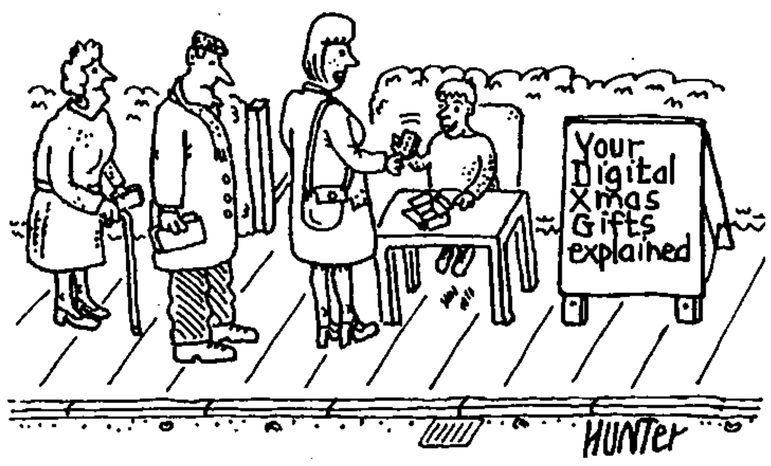
Sussex born and bred Fr Tim attended catholic schools in Lewes, Horsham, Ifield and Crawley.
He trained at St John's Guildford after a spell working on building sites and exposing himself to as wide a range of people as possible.

West Sussex Gazette

SUPERMODELS

KERBER

FASHION DROSS WEEKLY
GOD– TOMMY HILFIGER SOLD FOR 1·6 BILLION DOLLARS!!!
THAT'S SOOOO CHEAP FOR AN ITEM OF CLOTHING! .... WHAT WAS IT, A PAIR OF JEANS? A SHIRT ?



Open question

Sir,

Callum May's email (Eye 1147) re Nooks & Corners is wrong. The village of Falmer is actually across a B road from the proposed stadium. There will be no undeveloped land between the village and Brighton to the west. There is still open downland to the north up to Ditchling Beacon, the east to Lewes, and the south up to Woodingdean.

But for how long? Most of this land, which is currently farmed, is owned by Skidrow Council. Your piece "Seagull Droppings" in the same Eye has it exactly right. Prescott's decision has set a terrible precedent. If the stadium is built, much of the land up to Woodingdean will almost certainly be developed, becoming a hinterland of warehouses and superstores.

Yours faithfully,
SIMON BARNES,
Via email.

In praise of toilets

Sir,

Piloti rewrites the old cliché "How villagers managed to worship in their parish church for eight centuries without one (loo) passes comprehension". Surely in the same way toilets in National Trust, English Heritage and mansion houses should be objected to, and Piloti's ancestors also managed to dwell in houses without an indoor toilet; but I suspect Piloti wouldn't think about buying a house without one. Also is it worth pointing out the population is more mobile now, and regularly I lead baptisms, weddings and funerals where people have travelled several hours, and are surprised (and, sometimes, annoyed) when we don't have one. Having a village hall close by doesn't always help, when it is booked by other people. Finally why does Piloti not address the very real question that some people need access to a toilet, with an increasing elderly population there are people who won't go to places without access to toilets?

How on earth does Piloti conclude from one toilet project that the Church of England "slips further into introverted sectarian tolerance" (whatever that means), and is the Church of England primarily a heritage organisation or part of the Christian Church?

Yours sincerely,
REVEREND CHRIS GOBLE,
Via email.

Garden leave

Sir,

Contrary to what Mr John Harris says, there is no secrecy about the proposals to regenerate the gardens at Chiswick House (Letters, 9 December). The details can be viewed on www. english-heritage.org.uk/chiswickproject.

This Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) application to their Public Parks Initiative focuses entirely on the gardens. There are absolutely no firm plans to build a "function" building next to the house.

As for Chiswick paying its way, it is a requirement of any HLF bid that a project is financially sustainable. All money generated would be reinvested in the site.

The tragedy is if we lose this opportunity to restore the gardens, they will just continue to decline and what is a hugely important historic landscape will be lost for future generations.

Yours faithfully,
MARTIN CLAYTON,
Project Director, on behalf of the Chiswick House and Gardens Trust.

Lookalike

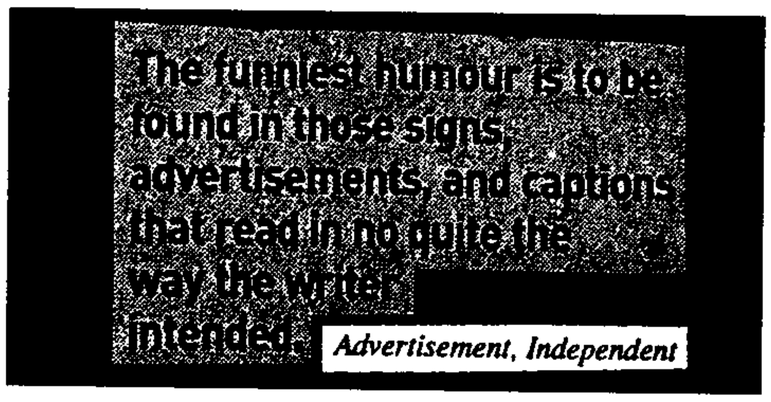
Mario

Professor Winston

Sir,

I've just noticed that Professor Winston looks like Mario.

A.J. NORGATE,
Via email


The funniest humour is to be found in those signs, advertisements and captions that read in no quite the way the writer intended.
Advertisement, Independent

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"Professor Gearty is hanging his hat on a red herring."
AUDIENCE MEMBER, 'Hecklers', Radio 4
(Peter Quinn)

"Crouch doesn't have the speed of quickness."
DAVID PLEAT, Radio 5 Live
(Simon Ottaway)

"Paul Scholes is the most complete midfield player. He's got the lot. There's not a weakness he hasn't got."
STEVE BRUCE, Sky Sports News
(Geoff Owen)

"He's been given an opportunity to play Test Cricket and he's taken it with both feet."
DOMINIC CORK, Sky Sports 3
(James Heather)

"The couple (Chris Flanagan and Henry Kane) who are amongst the first to get married under the new civil partnership legislation emerged from the Belfast registry office and happily flashed their rings to those who had gathered outside."
REPORTER, BBC News
(Roger Marsh)

SOLUTIONS

"Panalpina: On 6 Continents, a Passion for Solutions" – *freight*

"Matrikon: Solutions for Industrial Agility" – *computer software*

"Lifestyle Automation: Automated Solutions for the Lifestyle You Deserve" – *electronics*

"Staffmark: world-class workforce solutions" – *temp agency*

"Arcelor: Steel solutions for a better world" – *steel*

"B&Q Shower Solutions" – *showers*

All submitted by readers

Sparks fly

Sir,

Your source on "DIY Disaster" (Eye 1148) seems pretty well-informed. Doubtless Lowri Turner will suspect my involvement although I can honestly put my hand on my heart and swear I "knew nuffin', guv" till I opened my copy of your esteemed organ.

But I would like to correct one misleading impression left by the story.

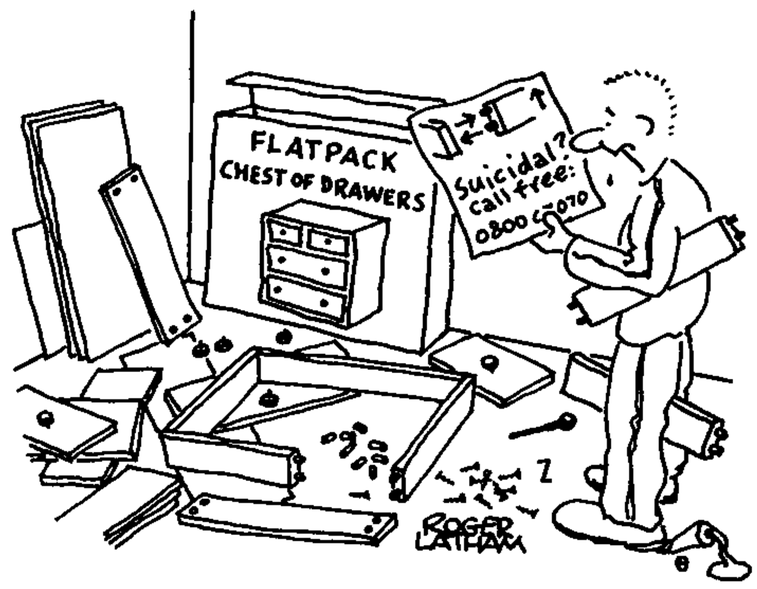
Although I certainly do not share my former wife's assertion that stay-at-home mums are "spaghetti-brained" morons or "intellectually stunted", I am not currently a stay-at-home parent myself. But – yes – I am very actively involved with my son's school and parental support groups, although the Boden catalogue and exotic soup recipes tend not to rank high on my own priority menu!

For the record, I run a small media consultancy and head up communications for the splendid children's medical research charity SPARKS (Sport Aiding Medical Research for Kids) as well as having been awarded joint custody and care of our two young sons and juggling my diary accordingly (as the boys spend at least 50 percent of their lives living with me). But that is something else their mother tends to airbrush out of her various media appearances on the subject of motherhood.

I'm putting the record straight just in case the Eye's eagle-eyed readership might feel moved to support SPARKS... a very worthy charity which believes in having fun while raising well over £1m a year net to fund pioneering research into conditions such as childhood cancers, childhood arthritis, spina bifida, cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy and the dangers associated with premature birth.

Just take a look at our website www. sparks. org.uk.

Thanks,
PAUL CONNEW, Head of Communications, SPARKS,
Via email.



All weather Pitch opening cancelled due to heavy snow

Bude & Stratton Post

Letter from **Sakhalin**

from Our Own Correspondent

OURS is a land of extremes. In north-east Russia, we are used to winters where the temperature dips 30 degrees below and summers when it might rise around that much above zero. For years we have had industrial waste from China in our rivers, and Japanese pirates plundering our seas for caviar. Now we are waiting for the promised transformation of our low-key oil industry into a world leader from the prodigious reserves beneath our icy seas.

The vehicle for our anticipated bonanza is Sakhalin Energy, a consortium split 50:50 between Shell and its Japanese partners, Mitsubishi and Mitsui. They are building Russia's first Liquified Natural Gas (LNG) plant on the southern tip of our island, which is supposed to come on stream in 2007.

We read about all the splendid things Shell has done in Nigeria, while our older citizens remember Mitsui for its robust approach to staff relations during the Second World War. Under imperial Japan's occupation, Korean slave labourers were brought in to work (and die) in our coalfields.

The LNG plant at Aniva Bay is the biggest construction project in Russia, maybe the world, and the twin pipes that link it and a new oil terminal, to the oil and gas fields up north, run almost the entire length of the island. But things are not going well. The project is six months behind schedule and costs have suddenly doubled to $20bn.

There are many reasons for the delay. Our favourite is to blame the Western Grey Whales that migrate here in summer. There's only a hundred or so of them left, and although they breed off the coast of Korea, they bring their calves to feed off the shallow fields of crustaceans that are unique to this region. One of their favourite dining areas is the very place Shell and co had chosen for their suite of oil rigs.

Luckily for our cetaceous visitors, the international whaling community persuaded Sakhalin Energy to re-route the pipelines that will carry the oil and gas onshore to the island. That, of course, will take time and this staggering sum of money.

Money is a sensitive issue all round. In October, our mayor Gennadiy Zlivko let slip that a senior Shell man and Sakhalin Energy bigwig, had offered him $50,000 in cash last May as part of land rental negotiations. "Even with my poor English I could understand what he meant," the mayor told the Dow Jones news agency. "I was shocked." Shell and Sakhalin said no such discussion had ever taken place and denied the allegation, which the mayor, undoubtedly of his own accord, duly withdrew in a fax written in perfect English within an hour of Sakhalin's statement.

It could be some time before we little people see much return on this massive enterprise. The Production Sharing Agreement signed with Sakhalin Energy by the central government in Moscow and our own Sakhalin regional authority means we will receive no share of the oil and gas produced until all project costs have been met – including a built-in profit – and that includes blow-outs like the one announced recently.

Independent oil industry experts say we were crazy to sign such a deal, but we did and it is binding. So ruinous are the terms and such have been the cost overruns that even when the money starts rolling in from exports to the US, Japan and warmer climes to the south – you surely didn't think we'd see much of our own energy – we may never get our fair share and still be huddling round our pathetic little coal fires for many winters to come.

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

"What I was trying to teach the children is that suffering is a part of life," Rev. Arthur Michalka told Texas health officials outside his Holy Trinity Catholic Church in Corn Hill, Austin. "I wanted to demonstrate the pain that Jesus suffered during crucifixion, so I called about fifteen of them forward during evening Mass, and pricked each of them with a pin. I didn't think it was that big a deal at the time. But now I appreciate the problem, and I'll see to it that it doesn't happen again."

Helen Osman, communications director for the Austin diocese, later told reporters that "pricking children with a needle is not appropriate religious training. We're conducting confidential interviews with the children to find out whether they have any communicable diseases. Health authority officials have told us that the likelihood of transmitting blood-borne diseases by a pinprick is real, but quite small, so parents should be consoled by the fact that, statistically, the overwhelming probability is that these kids will be just fine."

But local resident Debbie Sybert, whose daughter was one of those pricked, was far from happy. "What was he thinking of? Apparently, our holy father has lost his mind." *(CBS News, 17/9/ 05. Spotter: Brendan Joseph O'Byrne.)*

– o –

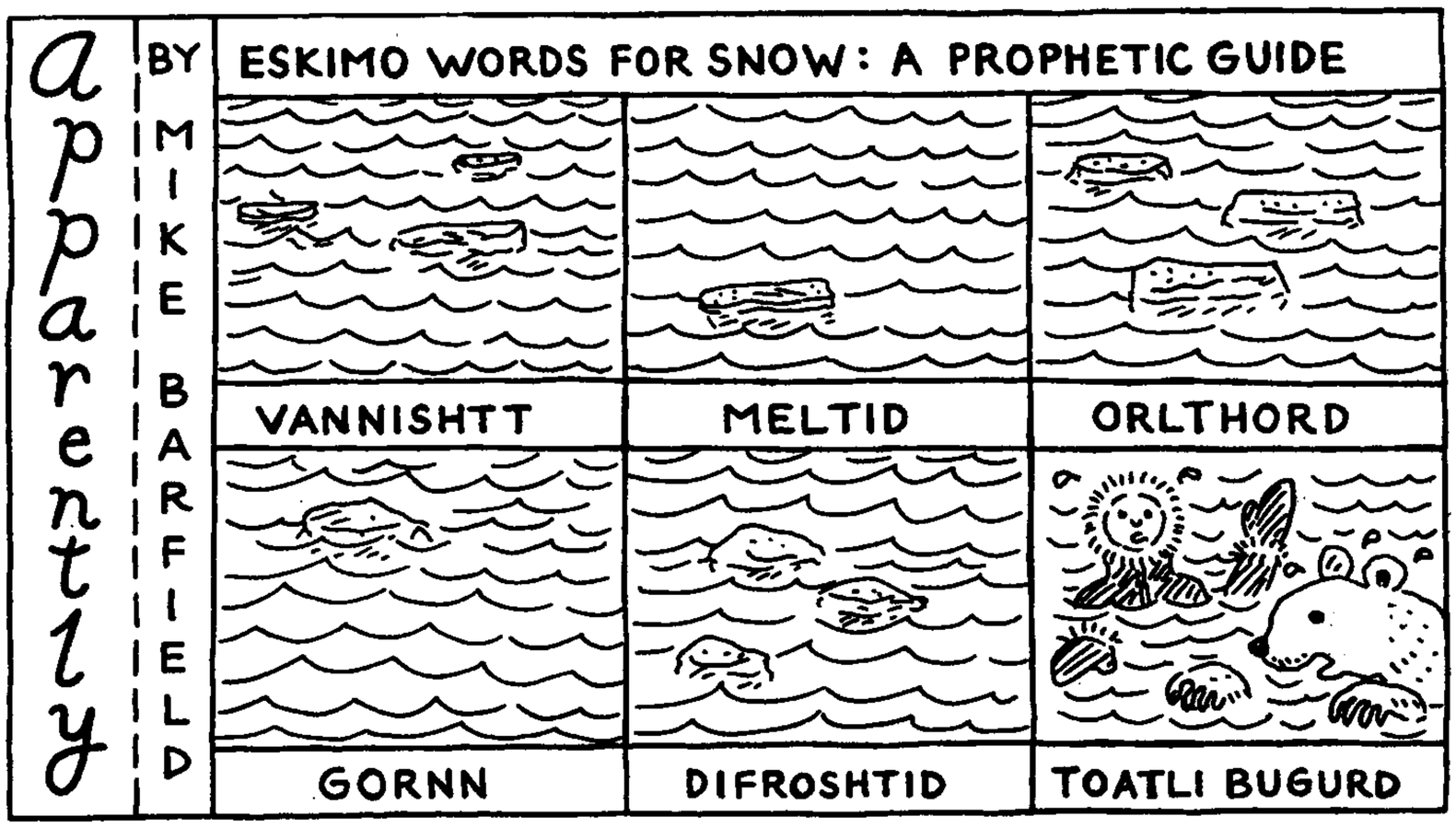
"*Operator Error in Medical Laser Accidents. Description: One user was teaching a colleague how to treat a patient for a disc herniation with a 804-nm diode laser. The initial power setting was 25 W, which is normally decreased to 15 W as soon as vaporisation is noticed in the disc. Since in this patient no vaporisation was observed, user decided he should try to carbonise the tip by short firing on a gauze with iodine. Trainee did not fire a short but longer pulse. Doing this, the gauze caught fire and so did his glove. He swiftly threw the gauze away, which in turn fell onto the drapes covering the patient. A fire ensued, which the user managed to put out with sterile saline. Of course, there was a nasty smell of burning, and it was explained to the patient what had happened. User proceeded with treatment. But then out of the blue: 5 minutes later the hospital's firemen came running through three separate doors (with signs that said 'laser in operation') without taking any precautions and stood there in the sterile theater because the smoke alarm had gone off.*

Follow-up: When teaching someone a new technique, make sure that you show the technique the first time and let the other do it afterwards. And make sure that fires can be easily put out by having proper materials at hand." (Lasers in Medical Science (2004) 19:105-111. Spotter: Tim Roberts.)

– o –

"I was traumatised when the vet diagnosed Terry with cancer in 2002," Josefine Lenzhofer told reporters in Carinphia, "and heartbroken when he died the following year. I had him cremated, and put his ashes in a small metal urn, so I could carry him on my regular flights between England and Austria, but the metal urn always showed up in the X-ray of my hand luggage, and caused delays. After several missed flights, I couldn't face all the aggro any more, and that's when I knew I'd have to find another way of keeping Terry close to me."

Ms Lenzhofer then explained how she'd turned the remains of her eight-year-old golden retriever into a glass pendant. "I'd always been interested in jewellery-making, so I started experimenting with Terry's ashes. Soon, I'd hit on a successful formula for combining them with glass, and turned him into a heart-shaped glass pendant, complete with a silver chain, so I could wear him round my neck. I was astonished when people started asking how much it would cost to turn their pet into jewellery too. I've had 45 orders this month alone, and this seems to have become a full-time job. I charge £280 for a standard necklace, and £500 for an exclusive edition encrusted in pure silver. So far, I only cater for pets, but who knows? I could easily preserve humans too, at no extra cost." *(Newsshopper, 2/11/05. Spotter: anon.)*



ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

Hullo,

And firstly, can Cherie and I thank you very much for all those wonderful Christmas cards which we found pushed through the door when we got back from out little "winter break" in the Holy Land (or quite nearby!).

I was sorry to see that there had obviously been a bit of a mix-up by whoever was responsible for choosing one of the two cards, because instead of the traditional seasonal message, it read "Wishing you well in your retirement".

Since it was signed by the entire congregation, I was rather surprised that no one had noticed – but I am sure you all meant well!

At least the other card, from Tesco, managed to get the traditional message right – i.e. "Tesco's Two-for-One Turkey Offer – Hurry, hurry while Christmas lasts!".

But enough of the festive season and all that goodwill, Christmas 2005 is actually one I would be very happy to forget.

As you may remember, I had to go over to Brussels before Christmas for a meeting of the Oecumenical Union Council (for which, incidentally, yours truly was "President").

And guess what happened? Talk about predictable!

As soon as we'd finished our lunch, our French friend Monsignor Chirac called for the bill and handed it to me, saying to the entire table in that pompous way he has, "We're all agreed that Rev. Blair should pay for everyone".

This was exactly what he said last time! And I repeated what I said before – that it was completely unfair that my parishioners should be expected to fork out for all the vast quantity of food that everyone round the table – all twenty-five of them – had consumed!

Monsignor Chirac, as usual, didn't stint himself at all, as he munched his way through the following items, viz:

- 2 kilograms snails in garlic butter
- 58 "jambes de grenouille" (whatever they are!)
- 6 lobster thermidors, stuffed with foie gras
- 1 trolley full of assorted cheeses (French only)
- 300 profiteroles.

And if that wasn't enough, you should have seen what the new woman pastor from Germany managed to tuck away! Frau Merkel managed to make her predecessor Pastor Schroeder look as though he was on a diet.

It would be unfair to go into detail, but suffice to say that at one point it looked as though Brussels was going to run out of sausages and sauerkraut entirely!

Anyway, when it came to the bill, I had to point out that I had made a solemn pledge to my parishioners that I would not agree to spend a single extra penny from the parish funds on providing free lunches for our continental colleagues!

Then Monsignor Chirac had the audacity to point down to the bottom of the table where the Polish, Slovakian and Latvian ministers were putting the cutlery in their pockets and say that they had only come to the lunch on the condition that Rev. Blair paid for everything.

"You are surely not expecting these poor people to pay for their own rollmop herrings and rye bread?" said M. Chirac, pretending to be all caring and compassionate to our eastern European friends (as he ordered another bottle of vintage Chateau Lafraud claret for himself!).

Well, naturally, I was not going to put up with this cheap blackmail for a second!

When I have given my word to my parishioners on something, I stick to it!

Do you remember my predecessor, Deaconess Thatcher, used to say all those years ago; "The vicar's not for turning" *(Book of Rebates,* 19. 84*)*?

Well, let me tell you, I'm a lot tougher than she ever was! And when it comes to "not turning", I can "not turn" just as firmly as she ever could!

That is why I refused to turn, right up to the end, and it was only at the very last minute when the whole table was shouting at me, that I finally agreed to pay the bill!

But I only agreed to do so on one condition: that Monsignor Chirac should think very seriously about possibly reducing his intake at our meals by asking for slightly less food than is his wont – e.g. perhaps one or two fewer snails!

When he saw how determined I was, Monsignor Chirac immediately caved in with a broad smile, and agreed to all my demands.

"Of course, mon cher Antoine, I will ***think*** about your proposition very carefully indeed!"

Only seconds later, he said "I have now ***thought*** about it, and the answer is "non".

Everyone round the table laughed sympathetically, to cover his embarrassment at the fact that he had been made to look a bit of a fool by my tough negotiating skills!

Yours,

Tony

A Plea to Parishioners!!!

The church "Bring and Buy" committee has asked members of the congregation not to hand in any more copies of *My Life As A Goldfish: Inside The Vicarage* by Mrs Cherie Booth Q.C. and Melvina Barg. Of course it is a brilliant book, but we already have several hundred second-hand copies contributed by generous parishioners, and the books are not selling quite as quickly as we would have liked.

Mr Brown's New Year Resolution
(as suggested by the vicar!!)

I MUST BE MORE PATIENT!!

As seen by local artist Mr de la Nougerede

The Legal Beagle!

Local solicitor Mr Falconer writes

There seems to be some misunderstanding about the Parish Policy with regard to Freedom of Information. Of course you are free to write in with whatever silly questions you care to ask about how St Albion is run. That's democracy! But what a lot of you don't understand is that I am also free not to tell you anything if I do not want to. That's also democracy!

So let's hear no more about this silly idea. C.F.

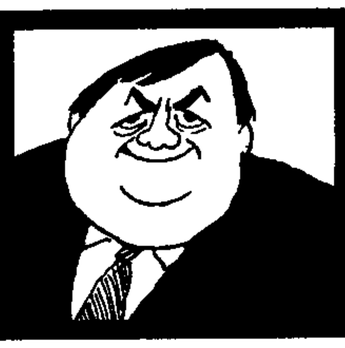
This Year's Best Christmas Cracker Joke!

Q: *Why is the vicar like a Christmas fairy?*

A: *Because every year he ends up "top of the tree"!*

(Thanks for that one, sent in by Mrs Blears. Well spotted, Hazel!)

A MESSAGE FROM MR PRESCOTT, DEPUTY CHAIRMAN OF THE PCC



LISTEN. I am extremely disenheartened by the negative respondences to my Parish Building Initiatives: i.e. the poncey middle-class so-called "country-lovers" who whinge every time I suggest putting a few thousand houses on the churchyard, the kiddies recreation ground or the parish cricket field (only a game for toffs and nancy boys, in my view).

Let me make it abundantly clear that we need every available metre of space in this parish to provide much-needed housing stock for our rapidly growing population of asylum seekers, divorced parents and old folk living on their own. These are the groups whose needs must be urgently prioritivated rather than effete toffee-nosed middle-class tossers (if you'll forgive my French!), bleating on about how wonderful the view used to be from their so-called patios and conservatoires before we were fortunate enough to get the new Tesco extension at the bottom of their gardens.

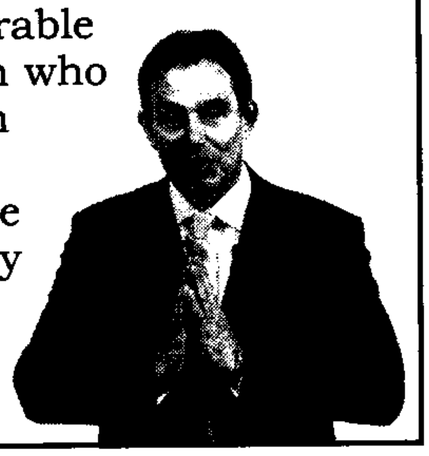
And while I'm on about poncey middle-class boogers (forgive my Slovakian!), can I just say that the vicar's plans to turn our local Herbert Morrison Comprehensive into the PC World St Albion Technology Beacon Academy are just plain daft, and that soppy lass he's got in tow, Mrs Kelly, could do with a bit of proper educatering in the "school of life", if you ask me, which I know Tony won't because, frankly

Sadly the editor has had to cut the rest of this ranting and disloyal tirade for reasons of space (and also because Mr Prescott is extremely lucky to have a job at all, and was only kept there because the vicar needed to appoint someone from the Working Men's Club to make it look as if...

The Vicar regrets that he has had to cut the editor's comments for reasons of space. T.B.

To Remember In Your Prayers

● All those loyal servants of St Albion who have generously donated large sums of money to the vicar but have yet to be honoured by the parish due to a few envious and bitter members of the PCC. May these sour and uncharitable miseries remember the Biblical parable of the rich men who got into heaven immediately through the eye of the needle by giving Jesus lots of money. Q.E.D!!



Duchess of Love

A short story for New Year by DAME SYLVIE KRIN, author of *La Dame Aux Camillas*, and *Born To Be Queen*.

THE STORY SO FAR: Charles and Camilla have been to the Christmas service at Sandringham for the first time as a married couple.

THE NORFOLK landscape had never looked lovelier, clothed in a veil of white. The Royal Ensign fluttered proudly from the tower of the little, ancient church of St Stephen Le Fry, announcing that the Queen and her family had just celebrated Communion together.

And no one had enjoyed the simple service more than Camilla, Duchess of Marlboro-Lites and now wife of the heir to the throne.

As she and Charles walked together down the church path, lined with early snowdrops, happy thoughts teemed through Camilla's mind like a joyous swarm of honey bees going merrily about their business.

At last she felt truly one of the family! At last she sensed that they had accepted her on her own terms.

The crowd of loyal onlookers surged forward to greet her, holding out bouquets of purple Narnia lilies and slices of home-made Christmas cake, bearing the multi-faith messages that were now so much part of Charles's traditional Christmas: 'Merry Diwali and a Hallal New Year!'.

"Did you notice, darling?" Charles murmured, as they walked towards the waiting royal limousine. "They mentioned you in the prayers. Mater absolutely insisted."

And she had. How could she ever forget the moment when she heard the vicar, Canon Bernard Matthews, pronouncing the words "And we now pray for Charles, Prince of Wales, and whoever he is married to at the moment."

A thrill had gone through her like a bolt of electricity. Yes, that was her the priest was referring to! It was all going so well. This was turning out to be a Christmas she would never forget.

The car purred regally away towards the ancient walls of Sandringham Castle, where the royal family would soon be sitting down to a luncheon of organic turkey and GM-free brussels sprouts specially flown in the previous day from Highgrove by a helicopter of the Queen's Own Flight.

Charles turned towards his bride to murmur, "Look here, old thing, you know I've decided that when I become, er, you know, king-thingie, I'm going to have a sort of relaunch by changing my name.

"I mean, at the moment, everyone knows me as Charles, which has got sort of negative connotations. You know, chaps having their heads cut off and sleeping with orange-sellers – that sort of business. Well, you see, I've actually got hundreds of names that might be less of a problem. Like George, for instance."

Camilla looked puzzled. Where was this leading? In what way could a name be a problem? "So, do I have to call you Gazza instead of Chazza?"

Charles ignored her interruption. "Some of the adviser fellows thought that if I'm going to change my name to George, then maybe you should change your name as well."

Camilla was still confused. "You don't expect people to call me George as well?"

"No, Cammers," replied an exasperated Charles. "These chaps who've decided I should be called George have suggested that you should be given a new name as well. One that's really popular and that the British public would really go for."

There was a long silence as Charles groped for a tactful way to tell his new wife what the Royal focus group had come up with. "It's Diana," he finally stammered.

At once the East Anglian sky turned black and blizzards howled across the bleak and barren landscape.

© Sylvie Krin, the Pound O Ferry collection.

IPFRONTIERS

EXCLUSIVE PICTURES FROM ELTON JOHN'S WEDDING
The stars turn out for the ultimate celebrity do – only in Private Eye!!

The bride is traditionally late but **Liz** made sure she got to the wedding **Hurley**!! She came without you-know-**Hugh**, I'll **Grant** you, but she was every inch the queen of the event – apart from Elton, of course!

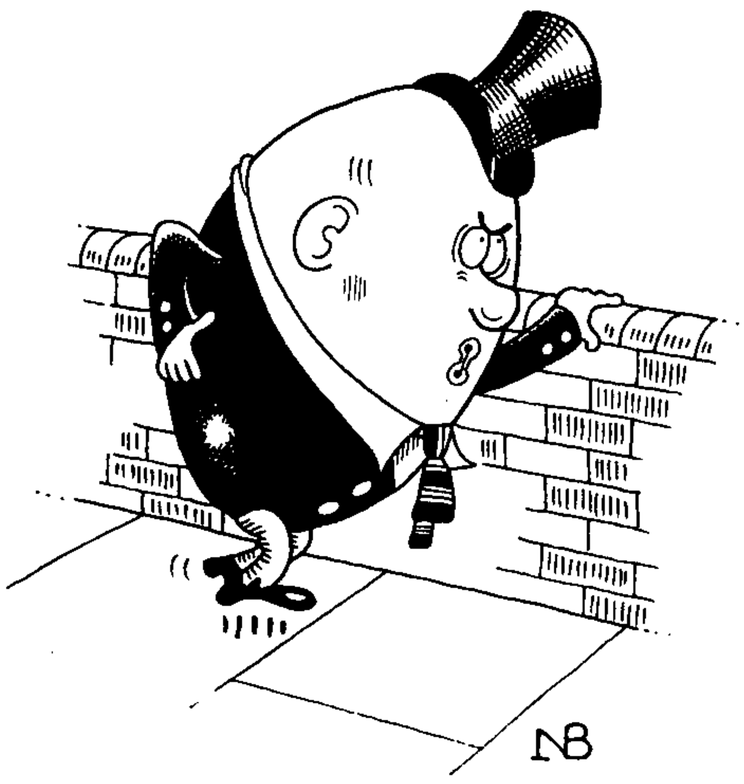
It's certainly a **Posh** do! But who has this **Spicy Lady** got at her **Beckham** call! Why, it's none other than **Ronan** who is **Keating** out of her hand! It's a Boyzone adventure but there's no doubt that Victoria is queen of the event – apart from Elton, of course! (*You've done this. Ed.*)

Caine you believe it? **Michael** certainly can't as he goes **Lulu** over this Scottish songbird! Or should we say he goes **Zulu**?! Anyway she certainly looks the queen of the evening – apart from Elton, of course! (*I said you've done this. Ed.*)

Cilla's wearing **Black** to a wedding! Or is it **Donatello Versace**? And who has she linked up with who seems to be right up her **Street-Porter**, why it's **Janet** of course. Unless it's **Paul O'Grady** in drag! Talk about gilding the **Lily Savage**?! Anyway, everyone was agreed that these two were the queens of the evening – apart from Elton, of course! (*Last chance. Ed.*)

These **Boys** don't run a **Pet Shop** you know! Elton's talented musical friends made a lovely couple. Unless they were ex-Beatle **Ringo Starr** and TV chef **Gordon Ramsay**. Or possibly **Paul O'Grady** and **Ronan Keating**? Or lovely **Cilla Black** and sparky **Lulu**? (*I warned you. Ed.*) Either way these two were very much the queens of the evening – apart from Elton and David, of course! (*You're fired. Ed*)

MODERN NURSERY RHYMES



Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall,
Humpty suffered a minor fall.
He sought compensation for his
loss of employment,
And claimed it affected his
sexual enjoyment

That David Blunkett Today Guest Editorship In Full

Blunkett: So, John Humphrys, do you not agree that in your position you are constantly undermining the democratic process by treating the country's elected representatives with a lack of appropriate respect?
Humphrys: What's your point, Beardie?
Blunkett: The question I'm asking, John, and that you are trying to avoid, is are you or are you not willing to have my babies?
Naughtie: And now Thought for the Day with Sophie.
Dog: Woof!
Blunkett: Thank you very much. Something to think about for us all there. And now with the time coming up to 8.13 we're going over to Annabel's nightclub for an in-depth investigation of the available totty still hanging around *(cont. 94khz)*.

SPORTS LOCKER
TRAINERS TO WALK AROUND THE HOUSE IN
TRAINERS TO WALK OUT OF DOORS IN
TRAINERS TO WEAR AT WORK
TRAINERS TO MUG PEOPLE IN
HEATH

NEW YEAR'S HONOURS

Lord Crazy of Frog, frog, services to the Telecom-munications Industry

Baroness Charlotte Church, singer, services to the Alcoholic Beverage Trade

Sir Michael Barrymore, entertainer, services to the swimming pool industry

Dame Farla Alam, slapper, services to various men at the Football Association

(continued from page 1)

CCTV

M.J.R. Paper-Clippe, Assistant Head of Filing, Ministry of Envelopes, services to the stationery industry;

IPOD (UK & Commonwealth)

V.J. Cruk, tax consultant, Cruk and Co, Grand Cayman, services to the Tax Avoidance Industry; I.O.U. Dodgee, creative accountant, Dodgee International, Jersey, services to personal wealth creation; R.R. Pension-scam, financial adviser, the Non-Existent Islands, for services to the very rich;

PSP (Civil)

B.R.J. Routemaster, bus driver, services to the No. 19; N.E. Morefares-Please, bus conductor, services to the No. 19; D.L.P. Longe-Waite, passenger, services to the No. 19;

ASBO

Gordon Tourette, Ramsay's Restaurant, for swearing on the fucking television *(That's enough Honours. Ed.)*

Sir Peter Doherty, singer, services to the Colombian import/export trade

Dame Holly Flintoff, baby, services to being Super Freddie's daughter

Lord Rooney of Spudface, footballer, services to Elderly Workers in the Sex Trade Association

Sir Duko, best-selling puzzle, services to the newspaper industry

GOLDEN DODDY: Ken Dodd celebrates 500 years in show business in the Happiness Show at the Philharmonic Hall on Thursday and Friday

Photo caption, Liverpool Echo

Those Daves Write

DAVE SPART (Co-chair of the Tufnell Park Wave Power and Pedestrian Rights Collective)

Er... global warming... sickening third world poverty... er... totally unfettered capitalism... to my mind... er... thatcherist legacy discredited... er... global warming... ***(cont. p. 94)***

DAVE CAMERON (Co-chair of the Bullingdon Club and Beagling For All Soc. [Oxon])

Er... global warming... sickening third world poverty... er... totally unfettered capitalism... to my mind... er... thatcherist legacy discredited... er... global warming don'tcha know ***(cont. p. 94)***

CAPTION: Caption needed in this space here if you'd be so very kind indeed kind indeed kind indeed

Express & Echo

JANUARY SALE

From The House Of Cameron

INCREDIBLE NEW YEAR TORY OFFER

★ *Once Only Clearance Of All Our Least Popular Ranges!!!* ★

1. FREE TRADE comes with fairness and compassion!!

2. POVERTY – slashed across the board with huge cuts to give the POOR better value!!

3. HEALTH – two beds for the price of one! Fantastic offer to make the NHS even more affordable for all!!

4. 50% LESS support for the police!! A huge cut in traditional backing for the boys in blue!!

5. Down, down, down on Big Business!!

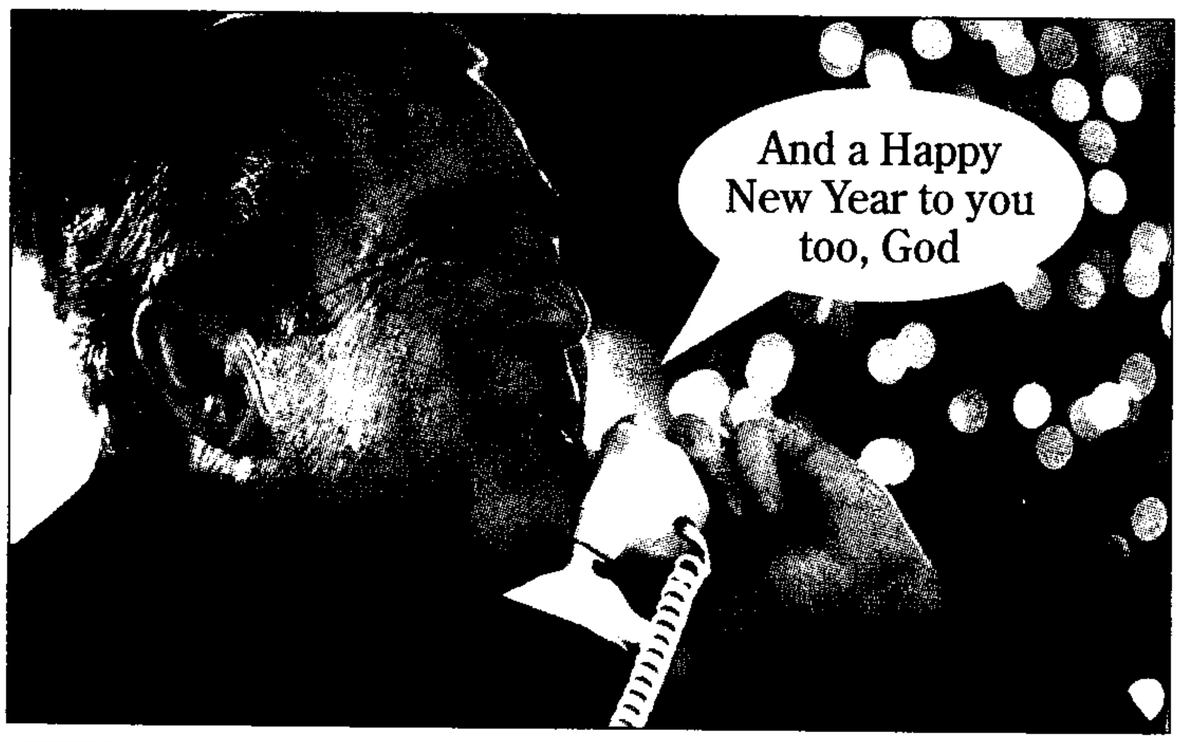
6. Drastically reduced Thatcherism! Must go!!!

Buy these amazing policies only from the House of Cameron!

Hurry, hurry, hurry while Tories last!!

★ *Says top salesman, Dave,* ***"We must be bonkers!!"***

BUSH MESSAGE OF HOPE



I Name The 10 Most Evil Men In British History

by Columnist of the Year (1952) MAX HASTINGS

BRITISH history is jam-packed with truly awful people whom one would not wish to sit next to at a dinner party, let alone spend a day's shooting.

One thinks of Jack the Ripper, Florence Nightingale and the Venerable Bede. Absolute shockers, every one of them.

They'd be blackballed at Brooks's before you could say Brown Windsor soup.

But to top historians such as myself, there are even more gruesome and sinister figures lurking in the shadows of our island story.

Here they are, my personal top ten of the most evil men who ever lived:

❶ Hitler

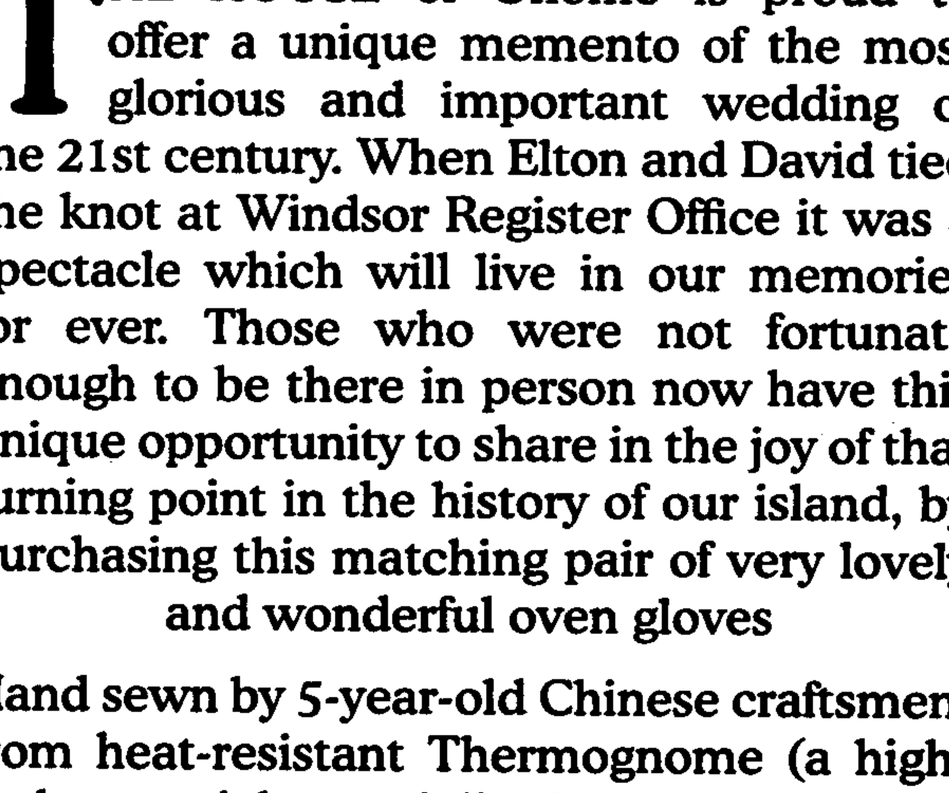
THIS appalling tyrant ruled with a rod of iron over the Daily Telegraph and the Evening Standard for twelve years, before being toppled from power.

'Hitler' Hastings spent the twilight years inflicting untold misery on millions of innocent readers, by writing interminable columns in the Daily Mail on such themes as 'Why I Like Wasps!', 'Why I Like Rain!' and 'Isn't It Amazing That I Get Paid For Writing This Appalling Drivel?' Surely, no more repellent *(cont. p. 94)*.

"I worry about Raymond..."

An unforgettable souvenir of the wedding which made history!!

His and His Oven Gloves



THE HOUSE of Gnome is proud to offer a unique memento of the most glorious and important wedding of the 21st century. When Elton and David tied the knot at Windsor Register Office it was a spectacle which will live in our memories for ever. Those who were not fortunate enough to be there in person now have this unique opportunity to share in the joy of that turning point in the history of our island, by purchasing this matching pair of very lovely and wonderful oven gloves

Hand sewn by 5-year-old Chinese craftsmen, from heat-resistant Thermognome (a high-tech material especially developed to allow the EU's Galileo space project to withstand solar wind), these priceless mementos come in a choice of three colours: pink, lilac and pink.

Each glove bears the individualised portrait of one of the civil partners who are now joined together in the same very beautiful way as these heart-warming, heat-resistant oven gloves.

WARNING: Do not use these commemorative gloves in a hot oven situation

£999.99 for each glove (plus VAT)

Send card details now to:
Gnome Glove Offer, Unit 94, Ojukwu Trading Estate, Lagos, Nigeria
(allow 28 months for delivery).

GLENDA SLAGG

FLEET STREET'S TOP CRICKET WRITER OF THE YEAR!

■ SO KERRY PACKER has popped his clogs!! I say Good Riddance!!?!

You ruined the noble game of cricket for ever. Turning it into a pyjama game for overpaid prima donnas!!!

Pink pads? Yellow socks? Green balls? Do me a favour!?!

The 'Packer Circus' was literally that!! A bunch of clowns making fools of themselves!!! And you were the biggest clown of them all!?! Now you've gone *down under* for good!!!

■ *HATS OFF to Kerry Packer, the man who single handedly saved cricket from the stuffed-shirt brigade!!?!*

He was the golden-hearted digger who had the guts to dress cricketers up in pink pads and yellow socks and give 'em a green ball to play with!!!

We all owe you a huge debt of gratitude!?!!

And even though you came from Down Under, you're now 'up there' on a cloud where you belong!!!

Byeeeee!!!

© Simon Barnes (surely Glenda Slagg? Ed)

EXCLUSIVE TO THE DAILY MAIL

What do they have to hide?

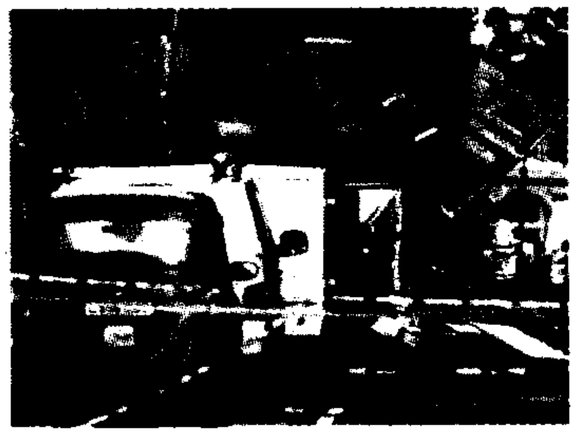
LABOUR was last week accused of running scared from a potentially devastating public inquiry into the July 7 attacks in London.

But why are they refusing to hold such an inquiry?

Many vital questions remain unsolved. The most pressing include:

Why weren't any members of the cabinet killed in the attack? Was it because they were "warned" they would take place?

Were the bombers coached and trained to carry out these deadly attacks in Number 10



by Cherie Blair?

Was John Prescott the fifth bomber?

Of course the answer to all these questions is "no", but we wish with every fibre of our being that it was yes *(cont. col 94, p94.)*

SADDAM COURT SHOCK

by Our Man in Iraq **AA Guilty**

NEWS has emerged from Baghdad that Saddam Hussein's victims have once again failed to appear in court.

A legal expert said, "Rumours as to why they haven't bothered attending are rife. Some say they are not happy with the facilities, others say they haven't been allowed enough cigarette breaks – although some believe it might have something to do with the fact that they were butchered to death."

POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam
Julio Iglesias Senior, aged 90

So. Farewell then
Julio Iglesias Senior
Father of Julio
Iglesias Junior
And grandfather of
Enrique Iglesias.

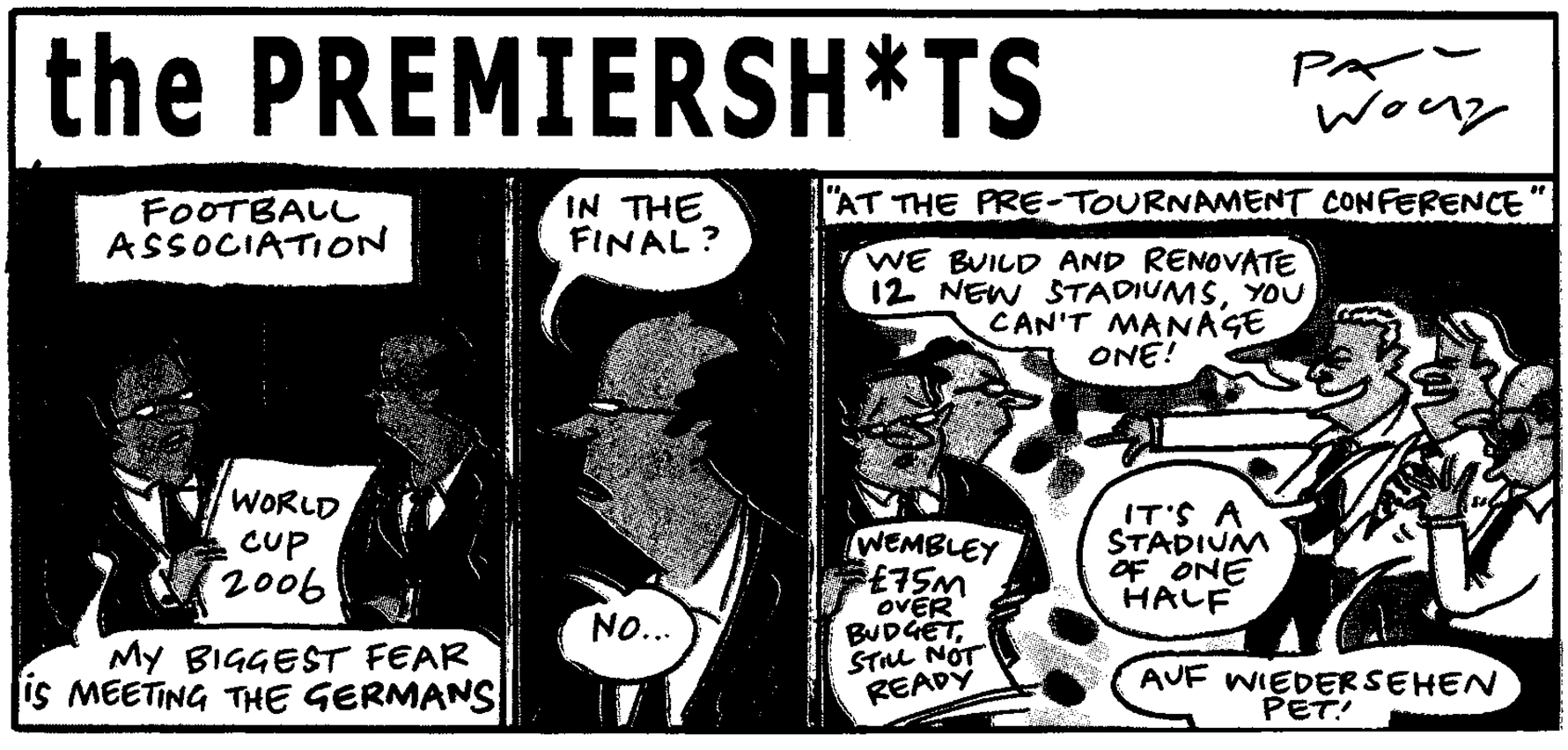
You were best known
For your amorous proclivities
In old age
And also or course for being
The father of
Julio Iglesias
Junior and
Grandfather of
Enrique (cont. verse 94)

Enrique Julio Thribbesias
(aged 97½)

JUST FANCY THAT!

Africa-France summit meeting Bamako December 2004

the PREMIERSH*TS


FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION
WORLD CUP 2006
MY BIGGEST FEAR IS MEETING THE GERMANS
IN THE FINAL?
NO...
"AT THE PRE-TOURNAMENT CONFERENCE"
WE BUILD AND RENOVATE 12 NEW STADIUMS, YOU CAN'T MANAGE ONE!
WEMBLEY £75M OVER BUDGET, STILL NOT READY
IT'S A STADIUM OF ONE HALF
AUF WIEDERSEHEN PET!

"What a coincidence! I design housing estates for John Prescott too!

CAMERON'S NEW TEAM HERALDS NEW DAWN FOR TORIES

by Our Political Correspondent **Peter O'Bore**

DAVID CAMERON, the exciting new leader of Britain's Conservative Party, yesterday unveiled an exciting series of radical appointments which show how the Tory Party is no longer afraid to break the mould and to drag itself kicking and screaming into the 21st century.

Who are they, these new Tory policy-makers of the future?

1. Stepping up as chief adviser on how to abolish poverty in the Third World is legendary 1970s rock star **Sir Robert Geldof.**

2. Cameron's top adviser on industrial policy and labour relations is to be veteran pipe-smoker and tea-drinker **Tony Benn**.

3. To advise on foreign relations, particularly with the Muslim world, **George Galloway MP**, the veteran cigar-smoker and Saddam-fan.

4. To advise on leadership skills and policy coordination, **Michael Foot**, the veteran donkey-jacket wearer and scarecrow.

5. To advise on dialectical materialism, **Karl Marx**, the veteran biographer of the late Francis Wheen *(cont. p94)*

My eBay

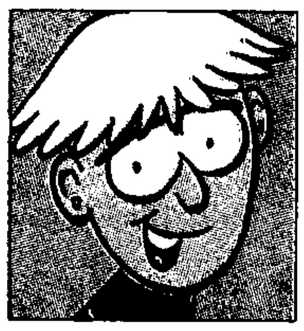
percentalcbyvol (40)

Items I'm Bidding On (1-5 of 5 items)

	Current Price	Postage Cost	Bids
☐ **"Kennedy - A Political Giant" - (JFK blog) 2 vols**	£8.99	£3.50	1
☐ **"The Joy of Fatherhood" (abridged) new, hardback**	£4.99	£2.99	1
☐ **"Tax Guide for Beginners"- (abridged) - new, hardback**	£4.99	£2.99	1
☐ **'Clarit-eeze' soothing eye-drops – banish redness, puffiness, bags – 1 litre**	£12.99	£4.50	1
☐ **Anti-perspirant spray – pack 12 cans**	£9.99	£4.50	1

Items I'm Selling (1-3 of 3 item)

	Current Price	Postage Cost	Bids
☐ **Digital alarm clock, triple alarm function, "snooze" button broken**	£3.99	£1.50	0
☐ **"Auld Masters" collection, 24 miniature classic whiskey bottles, on rack**	£49.99	£10.00	0
☐ **The Clash – "Should I Stay Or Should I Go?" – classic 45 (some hissing around, in last few bars)**	£2.99	£1.50	0



COLUMNIST OF THE YEAR

Boris Johnson on being voted Columnist of the Year

CRIPES. Blimey. Columnist of the Year, eh? That's something to live up to, isn't it. Fancy old Boris coming out top in jolly old 'Columnist of the Year' stakes!

So. What can one say, except blimey? Cripes! (continues in similar vein for 1000 words).

© *The Beano*

Who will be the new editor of the Spectator?

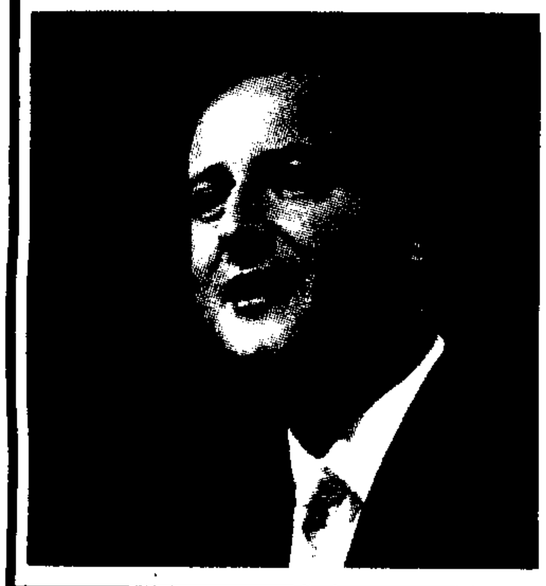
You choose who is to sit in the hot seat of Britain's best-loved political weekly.

A. Simon Heffer
B. Stephen Fry
C. Jamie Oliver
D. Jose Mourinho
E. Freddie Flintoff
F. Julio Iglesias
G. Ant and Dec
H. Boris Johnson

- Vote now for the most important job in British political life.
- Ring 0898 434142 *(Calls cost only £24 a minute)*

Winner will receive a framed and signed photograph of the Spectator's editor-in-chief Andrew Neil in famous "Asian babe/vest" pose

NEW LEADER OF LIB DEMS REVEALED



DIARY

JEREMY CLARKSON

Has anyone else noticed that it's now 2006? Yup. Not 2003. Not 2004. Not even 2005. But 2006. Blimey. Can you believe it?

Happy New Year? I don't think so. It makes you think, doesn't it? Heads down and pocket calculators out. Let's face it, 2006 is a full six years – SIX YEARS! – into what used to be known as the New Millennium.

New? Six years on, this Millennium is about as new as the socks I've been wearing these past six days because the washing-machine's on the blink and my dear wife, being a woman, bless her, can't be arsed to give them a good scrubbing with the Lifebuoy in the kitchen sink.

Smelly? You bet. To call my socks smelly would be an understatement. In fact, to call my socks smelly would be like calling your common-or-garden pair of woman's bazonkers only quite appealing! When they're in fact to a red-blooded bloke like moi they are quite amazingly appealing, and the same applies to you, mate – unless you're a fully-paid up member of the limp-wristed "Oooh, I love the arts" brigade!

So where was I? That's it. New Year. Or rather the so-called New Year. In fact, by my calculation it's been going a few days now. If it was a pint of milk, it would have gone off, and you'd toss it in the bin. And who likes milk anyway? It's a much-overrated substance, in my humble op. And pretty damned disgusting too. A lot of people don't realise this, but milk comes from a cow's udders. And who wants to drink something that's emerged from a Daisy's boobies? What do you think I am – a calf or something? Well, I'm damned well not. Have you ever seen a calf wearing jeans and a T-shirt, slamming his right foot on the accelerator and driving full-throttle down the motorway at 105mph in a Masserati 3.6 X before settling down in the snug with the blokes to set the world to rights over a decent pint of Best Bitter? You ain't? I rest my case, M'Lud!

New Year's resolutions? Not many, actually. In fact, just the one. Never to take a ride on the so-called London Eye again!

You must have seen it. It's that bloody great circular thing – monstrosity, more like! – that sits by the River Thames in London like a huge great wheel – which is basically what it is.

I went on it the other day, for my sins. Talk about rubbish. Queued up for what seemed like hours, even if it was just a few minutes. Then the uniformed officials – uniformed Nazis more like! – pointed me in the direction of a glass capsule.

"Sorry mate!" says I. "I'm not being cooped up in there! I'm a bloke! I value my freedom! If I wanted to travel inside a pod, I'd grow my own broad beans!!! Which means, I'll be riding outside, on the top!"

But guess what? You've got it. No can do. The deal was this: either you ride inside the pod or not at all. Welcome, my friends, to the wonderful world of the fascist state.

So you go into the pod, give a cursory nod to your passengers – many of them our foreign friends, I regret to say – and make your way to the driving seat. Wrong again! Guess what? There's no driving seat. Zilch. Some bugger's stolen it – and not only that but he's made off with the steering wheel, too.

What kind of vehicle is this, when it's at home? It crawls along at less than two miles an hour, you can't change direction, and there's no sound–system on which to play your classic Phil Collins tracks at full-blast. Not only that, but twenty minutes after you've set off you're back in exactly the same place you started out from!

For crying out loud, I'd have had more fun talking to a Dane and a German over a Nigerian cocktail in a Spanish-run hotel on a wet Sunday in Belgium! So the next time someone suggests riding on the London Eye, you know what I'll say? Not bloody likely, mate – not until someone fits my Pod up with a 1200cc engine, a pair of thermodynamic wings, best bitter on tap, a rocket-booster and a selection of half-way decent porn-mags!

Popped into my local boozer the other day, and saw a sign that said it all. "You don't have to be mad to work here" it read, "BUT IT HELPS!" That's me, folks!

Classic humour! Cracked me right up!

So why do none of our so-called great works of literature have anything half so pithy (I said PITHY!) to say for themselves?

Hamlet, for instance. By William Makepeace Shakespeare. Talk about wordy! I tried watching it once. Frankly, I'd prefer to occupy my time drilling a hole in my own head. Myself, I prefer my literature to have a bit of action. For my money, a book should be like a fast car – but with pages instead of wheels.

Jeffrey Archer? Let's be honest, the guy can spin a cracking yarn, and, admit it, you enjoy an Archer novel even more with every re-reading. The same cannot be said of old Shakeypoos. Much Ado About Nothing? You said it, mate.

Who was it who said the world was round? Don't make me laugh. If that was true, after you'd walked a few miles you'd find yourself at an odd angle, and then your hat would fall off. And when was the last time you saw a map which was curved?

Yup. The world's as flat as the proverbial pancake. And all the better for it.

To the assorted the nit-wits, nincompoops and borderline nut-cases who continue to insist that it's round, all I can say is – try flying to Australia, mate! If it's where they say it is – at the very bottom of the so-called globe – then when you disembark from the plane you'll be upside down, not to mention falling head-first into space!

It all goes to show, doesn't it, what a load of old cobblers the thought-police expect us to believe these days. It won't be long before members of the Fuhrer Blair's SS will be kicking our doors down, stabbing our family hay-bales with their bayonets, pulling our buttocks apart and strip-searching us all for proof that we aren't dissenters from their Political Correctness Gone Bloody Mad. Next, they'll be forcing us to swear that vegetables are good for you, that the French don't smell funny, that the Germans aren't hell-bent on world domination and that downing a dozen pints with brandy chasers dampens your driving skills.

Or else they'll be trying to tell us that cigarettes give us cancer – or that you're likely to come a cropper if you drive your sports car off Beachy Head! Sorry, mate – don't get me started on that one!

As told to
CRAIG BROWN

WE HAD A WONDERFUL TIME OF IT, CELEBRATING WITH CLOSE FRIENDS AND FAMILY...
IT WAS A RIGHT OLD FESTIVE EXTRAVAGANZA. TOO MUCH TO EAT, TOO MUCH TO DRINK...
THE TINSEL, THE FAIRY LIGHTS, ALL THE DECORATIONS, SPARKLE AND GLITTER EVERYWHERE...
ELTON AND DAVID'S WEDDING RECEPTION WAS AS CAMP AS CHRISTMAS, MATE...

Literary Review

Fowles mouth

John Fowles – The Journals Volume II

Ed. Charles Drazin

(Jonathan Cape, £25)

THE first hefty tranche of John Fowles' journals appeared back in 2003. One did not, consequently, have to be Old Moore to foresee the probable tone of Volume Two, rushed into print by Jonathan Cape in the wake of Fowles' death last November. Sure enough, here it all is again.

Martin Amis? "Makes his father seem like a warm-hearted humanist by comparison." Fay Weldon? "Lives in a kind of blowsy, expansive mess – like herself, in fact." Fatwa-era Salman Rushdie? "Rather like a Jew of the Tom Maschler and Freddie Raphael kind, permanently eager to get on yet somehow grudging that he is not better recognised..." Next to the brooding hermit of Lyme Regis, Evelyn Waugh seems the most genial of old buffers and Anthony Powell the acme of retired novelist's charm.

Not altogether surprisingly, the opening instalment of this charivari of pique and score-settling offered a whole hatful of clues as to what went wrong with Fowles and why a career that 30 years ago touched some of the loftiest literary heights imaginable should end up, come volume two, wandering around their increasingly jagged foothills. The young Fowles, several hundred thousand words of bitter rumination insists, was one of those classic post-war solitaries, disgusted by the middle-class mores of the family home in Leigh-on-Sea, Essex, and, in whatever metaphorical drill square he fetched up on, convinced that he was the only marcher in step. He cheered up a bit in the course of a teaching job on the Greek island of Spetsai, where he met his first wife, Elizabeth; but for a long time in the late 1950s – too long, perhaps, for his future comfort – the unpublished manuscripts stacked up in the drawer and prospects looked grim.

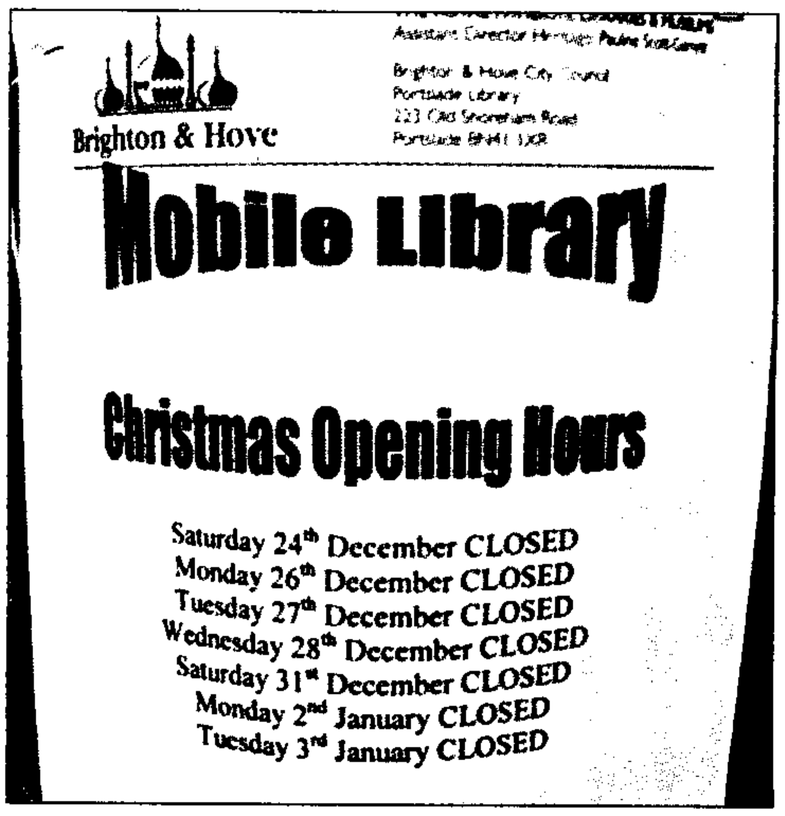
Finally, in 1963, Fowles hit the big-time with The Collector, a thoroughly nasty little parable of the class war, in which a vengeful oik named Clegg entombs nice middle-class Miranda in a remote cottage and watches her die of pneumonia. This was made into a not terribly good film starring Terence Stamp. Three years later came The Magus, on which our man had been labouring on and off since his teaching days, an immensely fruity 600 page skit on Existentialism – the original title was "The Godgame" – set on a (well I never!) Greek island. This was made into an even less good film starring Michael Caine.

By this stage, however, Fowles was luxuriating in his new-found status as the 1960s' best-selling highbrow writer. The sex-meets-philosophy-meets-exotic-locales went down especially well in the North American student heartland and, like Golding and Tolkien before him, he became a Lord of the campus bookshops. Fowles' reputation was further enhanced by the deeply modish and alternately concluded The French Lieutenant's Woman (1969). This was later made into a tolerably good film starring Jeremy Irons and Meryl Streep. Although it almost single-handedly created the template for all those pitiless reinventions of Victorian life that clutter the bookshop shelves 35 years later, its influence was horribly malign. For Fowles took his imaginary Victorian people out into the palisade of his late-20th century mind and patronised them, thereby establishing a pattern from which modern television dramatists still find it difficult to deviate.

But it was Daniel Martin (1977) that dealt the fatal blow. Billed as "a defence of humanism", something like a quarter of a million words long and sending volleys of intellectual fireworks up into the dim late 70s sky, this turned out to be the rambling autobiography of a promising playwright seduced by the wiles of Hollywood whose definition of "humanism" seemed to be a reluctance to say you were sorry.

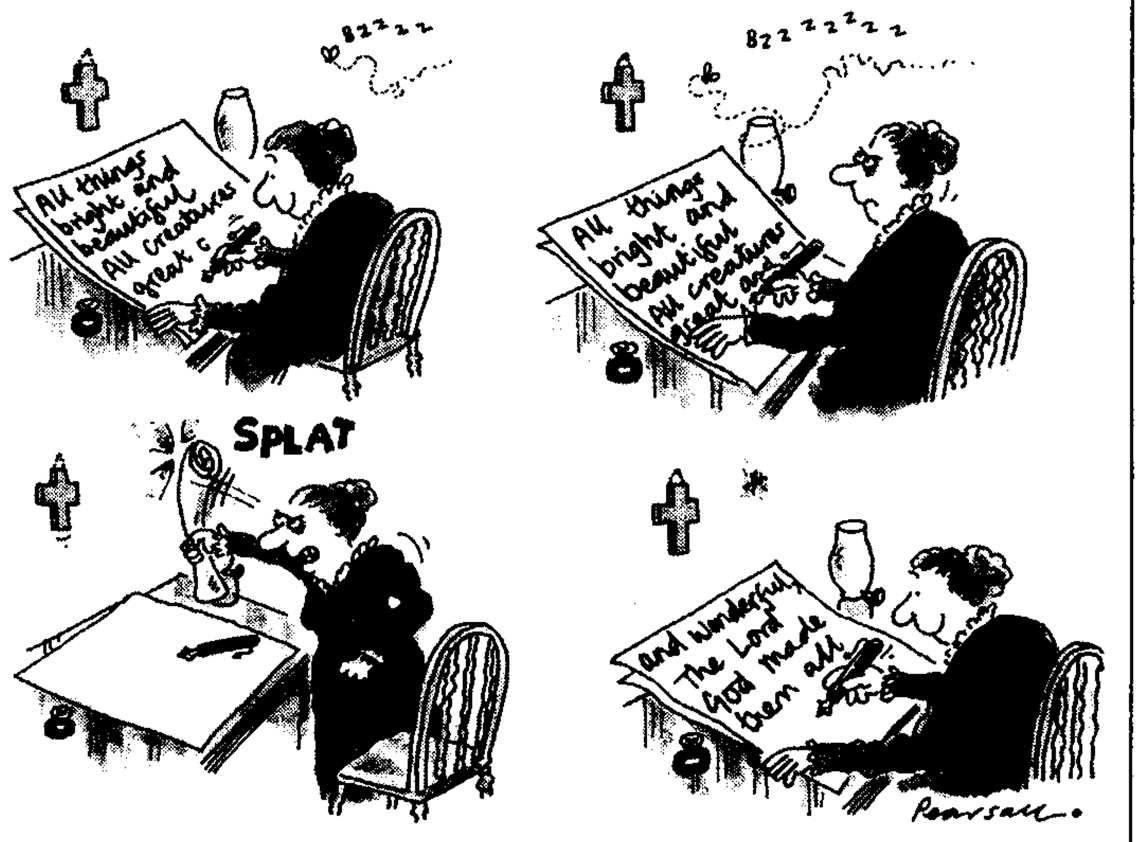
In the end, for all the braininess, Fowles appealed to something adolescent in his readers. Naturally the sex had a great deal to with this. Read at 17, Daniel Martin looked like a key to human experience. Read ten years later it looked like an exercise in self-pity. All very well for writers to chime with the sensibilities of their age, of course, but what happens when that age passes? On this evidence there is only disillusionment, misery and catty remarks about one's peers slowly distilling into the brooding darkness.

I-SPY *Brighton*



Submitted by Leo Littman

First Drafts


All things bright and beautiful All creatures great
SPLAT
All things bright and beautiful All creatures great and
and wonderful The Lord God made them all
Pearsall

Cecil Frances Alexander

Christmas Non-Book Round-up

IT'S the perfect gift for people you don't like. You were probably given several yourself by people who don't like you. It is, of course, the non-book. Here's a swift round-up of the season's nullest.

What Your Clothes Say About You by Trinny Woodall and Susannah Constantine (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, £20)

Thesis: TV fashion trouts' fourth best-selling non-book in four years, with all the same advice rehashed in different order with new photos of trouts looking even richer and more bad-tempered than before. Note that book is 33.42% more expensive than the equivalent book two years ago. Has already been translated into 43 languages. *General message*: what your clothes say about you is that you are sad, ugly and poor, unlike TV trouts, whose number is astoundingly not yet up.

Amazon reader review: "This book... seems to trade on insecurity and unhappiness... The underlying message seems to be to undermine your self-confidence and individuality and reduce you to a slavish clone of approved style."

It's for... the anxious; the disturbed; the emotionally vulnerable; regular readers of the *Daily Mail*.

New for 2006: What Your Clothes Say About You When You're Not In The Room. Or their first attempt at fiction, The Clothes Whisperer.

Memories Of John Lennon introduced and edited by Yoko Ono (Sutton Publishing, £16.99)

Thesis: The world's longest-serving professional widow flogs the dead horse of her husband's corpse in lavish pointless coffee-table tome. Contributors include Sir Mick and Sir Elton but no former Beatles or anyone who has anything even vaguely interesting to say. Dennis Hopper offers just one line – "All my memories are in the music" – while someone called Elliott Mintz drones on for 21 pages. The thought of anyone giving Yoko money for this rubbish is enough to make your eyes bleed.

Amazon reader review: None. No one bought it. Hooray!

It's for... its contributors; friends of Yoko; no one else at all.

New for 2006: At least 83 new Beatles books, as there are every year.

Is It Just Me Or Is Everything Shit? by Steve Lowe and Alan McArthur (Time Warner, £9.99)

Thesis: The world divides neatly into two groups of people, those who don't mind having a book with the word "shit" in the title on their shelves, and those who do. Unfortunately, all the people who bought this book were in the first group, and all the people they gave it to for Christmas were in the second group. 98 percent of all copies printed should be in charity shops by the end of January.

Amazon reader review: "I dont make a habit of enjoying books, they usually have there downfall. This book has no downfall."

It's for... grumpy old persons; anyone who bought books with the word "crap" in the title last year; Jeremy Clarkson.

New for 2006: Books with the word "bollocks" in the title. ("Fuck" is scheduled for 2007.)

More Flanimals by Ricky Gervais (Faber & Faber, £9.99)

Thesis: Thousands of children's titles are published every year, but only one has the magic words "by Ricky Gervais" on it. It's a simple enough idea: Ricky makes up chortlesome names of silly animals (stumpy hurgreebler, lurching blimt), illustrator draws them up, Faber & Faber directors buy second or third homes. One of the few books not published by John Blake that takes less time to read than it did to write.

Amazon reader review: "If everyone was as good at writing books as him we'd be in histerics. 10 out of 10 4 all his books!"

It's for... sad men who do David Brent impersonations in pubs.

New for 2006: Yet More Flanimals. Series could run longer than the Guinness Book of Records.

Class bore

Teacher Man

Frank McCourt

(Fourth Estate, £18.99)

YOU'RE listening, are you? Pay attention, now. I was saying teachers always repeat themselves because it's the only way you lousy kids'll ever learn anything, is if I tell it you over and over again. Now, where was I?

"Yo, teacher man, you was saying about how you keeps repeating yo'self."

And so would you, too, if you'd had the kind of miserable Irish childhood I've had.

"Yeah right, man, so what's new?"

All right then kids, turn to page 94 in your work books and we'll have a test.

"No, no, forget the test, man. Tell us about your miserable Irish childhood again. Please, teach, please."

Oh well, since you insist. You know you're good kids really, though you come from some of the toughest neighbourhoods of New York and you've got no future and you're all hard and cynical and disrespectful but underneath you're soft as unformed potter's clay and eager to learn so just this once I'll tell you all about how... (drones on for several hours about the horizontal rain of Limerick and the feckless bastid folk that did for him in the old country, etc, etc.)

"People everywhere brag and whimper about the woes of their early years, but nothing can compare with the Irish version." Thus began McCourt in *Angela's Ashes*, his memoir of childhood. He's right of course: nothing *can* compare with the Irish version of bragging, the Irish version of whimpering. "The happy childhood is hardly worth your while," adds McCourt, and after shifting more than four million copies of his first book, you can certainly see why. There's money in misery, if you can only tune your lyre.

And why stop at one? We are now on volume three and with no obvious sign of its being the last in the series. "In *'Tis* I wrote about my life in America and how I became a teacher. After it was published I had the nagging feeling I'd given teaching short shrift." So to correct this imbalance, we have *Teacher Man*, the opening sentence of which harks back, yet again, to "my miserable childhood in Ireland".

He eventually gets down to telling us about the daily grind of teaching in a public (ie non-private) secondary school in New York city: five classes a day, rowdy kids, impossible to keep order, no time to prepare, no time to correct their work, even if they hand it in, which they usually don't, preferring to expend their creative energy in forging elaborate excuse notes purporting to come from their parents, and so forth.

When the kids get restless or bolshy, he distracts them with yet more tales of his Miserable Irish Childhood™. No doubt this enabled him to hone his skills as a teller of said tales. If you can hold the attention of a bunch of hormonal teenagers, the genteel members of the average book club are likely to prove a pushover.

But O Lord, how he do go on about it! It's like a bagpipe drone, a lachrymose leitmotiv. Here we are on page 78: "You entertain them with stories of your miserable childhood. They make all those phoney sounds. Oh, poor Mr McCourt, must been awful growin' up in Ireland like that." Again, on page 195: "You don't have to be poor and Catholic and Irish to be miserable, but it gives you something to write about." And yet again, on page 246: "Mr McCourt, you're lucky," says one of his creative writing students. "You had that miserable childhood so you have something to write about. What are we gonna write about?" Said student then adumbrates the lack of incident in his own life and your man immediately convinces him that he, too, has a "miserable scenario" to write about, and that he should "cherish" such ingredients.

The hard luck story seems to be enjoying something of a boom, especially in America. Of course it helps being Irish. But the basic rule is the same: your triumph over adversity may take the form of nothing more remarkable than the fact of your having survived an unhappy childhood. The rest can be padding, what McCourt's professor at Trinity calls "a repetitiousness of style" and what McCourt himself admits is "blather".

A shorter version might simply have employed another Irish literary genre, viz:

There once was a teacher called Frank
Who was Irish, though born a Yank.
He grew up in Eire
With many a sob and a tear,
But now he's crying all the way to the bank.

JUST FANCY THAT!

■ WHEN you're at school and tell a whopping great lie to get yourself out of trouble, you probably think you're being clever. In fact, it's not you at all. It's Transparent Tony. He likes to sit in children's hair and whisper half-truths in their ears. A word of warning though. Transparent Tony is the worst liar in the whole world, because everyone can see straight through him. So, if you are telling a lie, and you think it's one of Tony's, stop! Nobody will be fooled."

– From *Ghostly Tales for Ghastly Kids* by Jamie Rix, pub. 1992.

BOOKS & BOOKMEN

■ AN EARLY contender for worst cash-in of 2006 comes with *Piers Morgan: The Classic Interviews*, a straight-to-bargain-bin special cobbled together by John Blake Publishing and put out this week in the hope that a few knackered shoppers might mistake it for a sequel to last year's bestseller, *The Insider*.

An exercise so tawdry that even Moron himself has declined to have anything to do with it, the book has been cut and pasted by former local radio presenter John Sachs from what were apparently "the landmark interviews conducted by Piers" during his time at the *Sun*'s Bizarre column in the late 1980s – notable for not even being written-through profiles, but merely standard questionnaires featuring such penetrating inquiries as "Height?", "Who do you fancy?" and "Favourite Food?"

Readers with a burning desire to learn what car Michael Aspel was driving in 1984, who Michael Barrymore used to claim he lost his virginity to, the moment Bobby Davro realised he had reached the big time or who the hell Emma Samms might once have been need only pay £7.99 for the privilege.

■ STEPHEN FRY's latest book, *The Ode Less Travelled: Unlocking the Poet Within*, shows that there is very little the author doesn't know on the subject of epithalamia and iambic pentameters. Stressing the importance of technical knowledge in any pursuit, he writes in his foreword that sailors are taught "that knots are hitches, and forward is aft."

As a number of *Eye* readers have been keen to point out when it comes to er, sailors' rears, Fry appears not to know his aft from his elbow.

'Bookworm'

Pseuds Corner

The Barbican is following in the footsteps of the Old Vic Theatre by staging its first ever pantomime next Christmas. The theatre has hired Mark Ravenhill, better known for his confrontational drama *Shopping and Fucking*, to write the script.

Guardian

Flann O'Brien once said we must keep the wolf from the door to prevent him getting out. For 12 years Ferguson has kept [Roy] Keane's snarling presence within the Old Trafford walls so that United could rule. Now the wolf is expelled. James Joyce gave another Irish conscience, Stephen Dedalus, this credo: 'I will not serve that in which I no longer believe, whether it calls itself my home, my fatherland or my church: and I will try to express myself in some mode of life or art as freely as I can and as wholly as I can, using for my defence the only arms I allow myself to use – silence, exile and cunning.'

In saluting Keane's life of violence, exile and running, there is the satisfaction of heroism and human grandeur, an athletic and aesthetic pleasure, something exalted and defiant about his refusal to serve. Keane's fall is proof that a civilisation without tragedy is dangerously lacking some element of esteem, some grave value whose loss we witness with much pity and, as always with Keane, a little fear.

RAY RYAN
Observer Sports Monthly

It is as if, on the bleak shingle shores and unremitting fens of East Anglia, a passion for fresh, wild, local produce has collided with a nonconformist mindset and produced a food culture that is metaphysical, bohemian, and reminiscent of, say, New England.

ANDREW PURVIS
Observer Food Monthly

The lengthiness and labour intensiveness of the pilgrimage provided a kind of buttress against the pressures of modernity, mass production and global capitalism.

Turner Prize exhibition curator RACHEL TANT on the winning entry, Simon Starling's 'Shedboatshed', quoted in the *Daily Mail*

Her face is pale and smooth, a moulded mound of translucent powder. Her eyes are a bright but dark green, like the colour of glossy leaves in sunlight. Her brow and lips are barely there; her bone structure so strong the rest of her face just suggests itself. Later, when I bring up her childhood, she gives a resigned sort of wince and does what I can only describe as pursing her eyelids – her features are so malleably expressive they seem to borrow each other's characteristics.

[Tilda] Swinton looks other-planetary; her friend Johnny Shand Kydd suggests that she can look like Dietrich one minute and Gollum the next.

GABY WOOD
Observer

This may be the closest that a television drama has come to evoking the serenity and sadness of a chamber piece by Schubert.

DAVID CHATER on BBC2's 'Sensitive Skin', *The Times*

CONTRIBUTORS: Ben Skelton, Eugene Weber, Anon, Tony Sandy, Matthew Phillips, APR

£10 paid for all entries

IN THE BACK

NIGER URANIUM

Tony baloney

JUST before Christmas a former top official in the French equivalent of MI6 revealed that in 2002 his agents had told the Americans that claims about Iraq seeking uranium from Africa were "bullshit".

Alain Chouet, who until the end of 2002 led a 700-strong unit at the Direction Générale de la Sécurité Extérieure (DGSE) investigating terrorism and weapons of mass destruction, told the Italian and American press about French investigations of Saddam's atomic ambitions. As well as causing further embarrassment to President George Bush over the fake claims made about Iraq's WMD, Chouet's tale also calls into question British statements about Saddam's nuclear plans.

Chouet told the Italian Newspaper *La Repubblica* that from 2001 onwards the CIA repeatedly warned its French counterparts about intelligence that Iraq was trying to get "yellowcake", a uranium ore, from Africa. As French companies ran the main uranium mines in former French colony Niger, the DGSE felt compelled to investigate. According to Chouet: "Between the end of May and June 2002, my men were in Njamey, the capital of Niger… Five of our best men were part of the team. With a deep knowledge of Niger and of all the issues connected to yellowcake. My men stayed in Africa for a couple of weeks and, once back, they told me a very simple thing: 'The American information on uranium is all bullshit'."

Chouet says the DGSE told the CIA there was no truth in the Iraq-Niger claims in 2002 – around a year before President Bush made his controversial State of the Union speech in which he said explicitly that Saddam was trying to get his hands on African uranium.

Chouet's story also raises more questions about Britain's Niger uranium claims. In Tony Blair's September 2002 dossier it was asserted that "there is intelligence that Iraq has sought the supply of significant quantities of uranium from Africa"; and it was this statement Bush relied on in his speech. However, while America has withdrawn its claims after documents purporting to show a Niger atomic plot were shown to be forgeries, the British government still claims it has separate intelligence that is not tainted by the fakes. However, if the French DGSE were investigating and discounting the Niger-Iraq story in 2002, British claims of extra "foreign intelligence" on the issue look even less convincing.

Chouet also says that even as far back as the summer of 2002 the CIA sent the French papers outlining a Niger-Iraq uranium deal, but that he later noticed the substance of these claims was almost identical to the story about the "500 tons" of yellowcake ore that eventually appeared in the fake documents that came to the US from disgraced former Italian intelligence officer Rocco Martino in 2003. This suggests that the many tales knocking about western intelligence before the Iraq war were simply different versions, transcripts or summaries of the Niger forgeries.

Chouet told the *Los Angeles Times* that his French experts believed the statement in Blair's September Dossier was "totally crazy because, in our view, there was no back-up for this". If French intelligence actually told MI6 that its claims were "totally crazy", then the UK's pre-war dossier looks even more like simple propaganda and less like "intelligence".

Private Eye tracked down Chouet to ask him if the DGSE had indeed told the British authorities that there were no grounds in the Niger claims at the same time as it told the CIA the Niger claims were "bullshit". Unfortunately M. Chouet has clammed up a little since speaking to Italian and American journalists. He told the *Eye*: "Unfortunately, since the so-called 'Nigergate' issue is now under police or justice inquiry in several countries including France, I'm no more entitled (ie it's totally prohibited for me...) to talk any more about this topic with anybody and specially to deliver any interview to the press."

In France, Italy and the US there are now criminal investigations into the "Niger forgeries" to discover if Rocco Martino or any other conspirator is guilty of a fraud that helped to start the war on Iraq. There is no such investigation in the UK.

While Chouet may no longer be able to talk openly about the issue, the British government, or the Parliamentary Intelligence & Security Committee, could look into the issue. Unfortunately, unlike the Europeans and Americans, all these bodies seem to have "moved on" and express no desire to find out whether British officials were warned about "crazy" claims

ABUSE OF POWER (1)

Age before duty

WHEN two police officers arrived to arrest Eliza Greenhall at her Carlisle home shortly before Christmas, they weren't going to stand any nonsense.

So even though Mrs Greenhall is aged 79 and three-quarters and registered disabled with a serious heart condition, after she protested that she needed to cancel a doctor's appointment, they insisted on handcuffing her and escorting her out to their waiting car. Mrs Greenhall's crime? Failing to pay council tax arrears of around £800.

The unpaid bill and warrant for her arrest came about after a dispute over the calculation of Mrs Greenhall's disability allowance and pension. In addition, a year ago she lost almost everything in Carlisle's floods.

Generously Carlisle magistrates declined to send Mrs Greenhall to prison for Christmas, putting an order for recovery of the debt against her possessions (though due to the floods she doesn't really have any). However, Mrs Greenhall and her family are outraged by the heavy-handed and humiliating actions of the police. "There really was no need to put me in shackles," she said. "I wasn't putting up a fight. I am 79 and I just wanted to call my GP to cancel my appointment. One of them even tightened the things with what looked like an alum key."

It was in fact the second time officers from the Cumbrian force had arrived to enforce the arrest warrant for non-payment. The first officer, after talking to Mrs Greenhall and asking what it was all about, said he would take more advice, adding that should he return "it would be with kindness".

Asked about its distinctly unkind treatment of a frail and elderly women, a spokesman for Cumbria police said that because of her age and disability, special arrangements had been made to arrest and take her straight to court, rather than as is usual into police custody. The officers had allowed her to take her heart medication and decided that the use of handcuffs was "the safest way to escort her to the car". That's a new one!

ABUSE OF POWER (2)

Yorkshire prodding

THE arrest and conviction of Maya Evans last month for reading out the names of the Iraqi war dead in Parliament Square highlighted the outrageous anti-free speech legislation the government managed to sneak in under the guise of the Serious Organised Crime and Police Act 2005 (supposedly to set up an FBI-style crime fighting agency).

But thanks to a Cabinet-friendly standing committee, the government was also able to slip in clauses relating to "harassment" which are equally alarming and have nothing to do with serious organised crime either.

The new harassment offence is drafted so widely that all one has to do to fall foul of it is to "harass" two or more persons to persuade anyone (not necessarily the "two or more" in question) to do, or not do, something he or she is not obliged to do.

Incredibly, it seems that one of the first organisations to try to claim harassment is North Yorkshire County Council's press office – in order to avoid answering tricky questions from the media.

Journalists looking into the background of a sensitive criminal court case in North Yorkshire were investigating whether the police and local authorities should have acted earlier in the case. To this end a female journalist asked the council press office whether alarm bells had been sounded at one of its schools. Initially council press officer Tony Webster said he would look into the matter. He then called the journalist back and said he could not comment. When challenged he threatened that if the reporter called again, he would pass the matter on to the police "because this is harassment". Apparently that is what police were already claiming after the journalist had called the school once, who had directed her to the press office, which she also called only once.

When an astonished colleague of the journalist then emailed Mr Webster asking for an explanation and a reply to the questions, the response was: "I have received your email and I have forwarded it to the police."

The *Eye* duly asked North Yorkshire about the use of harassment threats and reporting the matter to police. The reply was a woolly statement which ignored the harassment issue altogether saying: "In responding to the inquiry the county council press office advised the two journalists that neither the school nor the Local Education Authority had any comment to make in relation to the court proceedings… that they were asking the wrong authority and that they could not be helped further."

So much for North Yorkshire's boast of being the "responsive" authority.

YOUNG OFFENDERS

No comment

LABOUR pledged its commitment to the young when it appointed a Ministry for Children. But one group that minister Beverley Hughes (pictured) clearly has little interest in are child offenders who are brought up in care.

Since the summer campaigners have been asking to meet the minister to discuss the plight of resettling children when they are released from custody. But to no avail. As Eye readers are well aware, a meeting might be constructive as children are being forced into homelessness and destitution when released from young offender institutions because local authorities make little or no provision for teenagers aged over 16 who are "too old" to go back into care.

One mentally ill girl with a history of violence was about to be sent to a Travel Lodge hotel until the Howard League intervened and, through the courts, managed to secure her a place in a mental health facility. Another teenager who was suicidal and had a history of abuse was about to be sent to a night shelter where he was at risk of further abuse.

The penal reform charity has taken legal action against more than 20 local authorities. Last July, its director Frances Crook wrote to the minister seeking a meeting. The letter was passed to her deputy, Maria Eagle, who declined to meet. The Howard League wrote again to Maria Eagle in September but heard nothing back.

At the beginning of December, Ms Crook wrote yet again to Beverley Hughes. "I am astonished that the Children's Ministry is not recognising this as a critical issue for the rights and welfare of children… Defending in court their abject failure to care for the most vulnerable and challenging children costs local authorities a huge amount of money. We know that these case are only the tip of an iceberg and that hundreds of children are poorly cared for on release from prison… This puts communities at risk from young people who are homeless, impecunious and angry and who sometimes have a history of violence." Reply came there none.

TOBACCO SMUGGLING

Smoke screen

THE government's inexplicably soft treatment of the big tobacco companies continues as allegations of official collusion in letting the firms off prosecution have been quietly and secretly brushed to one side.

When the *Sunday Times* reported last year that Customs and Excise had tried to hatch a deal with tobacco firms under which they would not be prosecuted for their alleged complicity in cigarette smuggling, in return for paying back some lost duty, Public Accounts Committee (PAC) chairman Edward Leigh insisted the matter should be properly investigated.

"Any perception that Customs has been involved in deals made in smoke-filled rooms [*sic*] does little for public confidence in our law enforcement agencies," he announced, before seeking to restore some much-needed confidence by asking a member of the Inland Revenue board, "independent" of the area concerned, to investigate the claims.

But as the Revenue and Customs were in the throes of becoming a single HM department, the Revenue board was anything but independent. The man handed the task was director Dave Hartnett, who from the merger in April took responsibility for tax compliance in the new enlarged department including the old Customs part. He produced his report four months later, by which time any pretence of "independence" had vanished.

Hartnett unsurprisingly found no support for the *Sunday Times* allegations, though the author of the story stands by them. The evidence, Hartnett concluded, showed that the deal was an unrequited commercial initiative on the part of the go-between, accountancy firm KPMG. All very reassuring: Customs acting properly while the beancounters were simply after their usual quick buck.

But a recent National Audit Office (NAO) review of the investigation suggests that it may have been worthless. Although the NAO found that "the evidence gathered... supports the conclusions drawn [by Hartnett]", there was in fact little if any evidence to go on. Customs "was unable to produce records of meetings held with the advisers of tobacco manufacturers", while Hartnett had "had to rely on the goodwill of the tobacco industry" (naturally abundant in a business devoted to poisoning as many people as possible). The investigation was also delayed because one crucial Customs man had been unable to remember details of meetings that were central to the allegations and for which there were no notes.

Thus the few glimpses that the NAO gives into the affair, far from putting Customs in the clear over events dating from the same time as the department was using court witnesses it knew to be untruthful (see *Eye 1147*), simply raise more questions. But *Private Eye's* request for Hartnett's report under Freedom of Information (FoI) laws was refused – by Dave Hartnett. (Asked whether he was really the right person to deal with a request for a report he wrote, HMRC pointed out that the FoI Act doesn't "stipulate who should be involved in the process".)

The Public Accounts Committee gets the chance to question HMRC chairman David Varney on Customs matters this month, and may prove less of a pushover on the smuggling claims than the NAO appeared. Until somebody asks some serious questions, there remains a strong whiff of smoke-filled rooms.

PS: The latest secrecy won't surprise anyone who has watched the government's dealings with big tobacco over the years. A DTI investigation into British American Tobacco's alleged complicity in smuggling concluded after four years that the firm had not acted illegally, but the government won't release that report either.

PRIVATISING HEALTH

PAC it in

BRITAIN's public spending watchdog, the National Audit Office (NAO), has long failed to expose the failings of the private finance initiative (preferring to appear at countless conferences alongside industry bigwigs). But few thought it would be prepared to mislead parliament in support of the policy.

That's exactly what happened, however, when the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) recently looked at the NAO report on the latest PFI ruse: the local improvement finance trust (LIFT) scheme to build new primary care facilities.

After hearing from a GP that LIFT premises were more expensive than existing ones, diverting money from already strapped budgets, and may disadvantage deprived areas by centralising services, the committee asked about value for money. The NAO report showed no comparisons with the non-PFI alternatives, prompting Labour PAC member Jon Trickett to query the absence of so-called "public sector comparators" (PSCs). The director of public private partnerships at the NAO, Patricia Leahy, replied categorically: "These schemes do have public sector comparators. We did not put that information here because value for money is not just about the cost side..."

So the *Eye* asked to see these figures to do some comparisons for itself, only to be told by the NAO that, er, they don't in fact exist and that the NAO would be sending a letter of apology to the PAC for misleading it on a crucial point.

The committee was also critical of the NAO's use of a consultant, Operis, for financial modelling work as the firm more commonly advises banks on financing LIFT projects, so came with an obvious interest in the programme. But NAO chief Sir John Bourn, also at the hearing, could see nothing wrong with that.

Operis's work showed that a sample of six LIFT deals gave the private sector a return of around 15 percent, slightly higher than the average for PFI generally. So while GPs have doubts about the plans and even the NAO doesn't have a clue whether it's worth the money, at least one thing is safe: the PFI companies' profits.

Cleaning up

HOWEVER deeply hospital trusts with unaffordable PFI deals sink into the financial mire, the advisers who helped put them there continue to prosper.

The two largest deficits revealed last month are to be found at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital Trust in Woolwich (estimated to be heading for a £20m loss this financial year) and the foundation trust running University College London Hospital (£17m down at the half year point), both largely because of crippling PFI commitments.

Help is at hand, however, from PwC, the auditor at the Queen Elizabeth, and KPMG, which has been brought in by foundation trust regulator Monitor to turn UCLH around.

Neither firm is likely to be impressed by the quality of financial advice given to the trusts when they negotiated the exorbitant PFI deals that they are locked into for decades. The Queen Elizabeth was advised by KPMG, while UCLH employed the financial geniuses at... PwC. Both were handsomely rewarded at the time and, in line with Treasury guidelines, almost certainly earned "success fees" when the contracts were signed.

Now the deals are bringing the trusts to their knees, they can trouser yet more fees trying to clear up each other's mess.

PS: KPMG has also been appointed by Health Secretary Patricia Hewitt to run the "financial hit squads" that are to be sent into NHS trusts with the highest deficits to turn round the anticipated £630m national shortfall.

EXPERT WITNESSES

Court out

MORE trouble for Jim Bates, the computer expert who has given evidence in some of the country's most sensitive trials and who, the *Eye* revealed, has been investigated over his professed qualifications. Or lack of them.

Eye readers will recall that Mr Bates claimed to have a BSc in engineering when he has no such degree and never in fact went to university. But it now appears he is being reported to the attorney-general for an alleged contempt of court, after it was suggested that he tried to record proceedings at Northampton crown court last October.

Police are also looking into how some hard disks that Mr Bates had given them and on which, as an expert for the defence, he had asked them to record indecent images, already seemed to carry indecent images given to Mr Bates in a separate matter.

Meanwhile the Crown Prosecution Service also appears to be concerned: namely about Mr Bates' impartiality and independence as an expert, because his website, which discloses details of Operation Ore, the paedophile internet porn inquiry, questions the professional competence (among other things) of the experts called by the prosecution.

When the *Eye* first approached Mr Bates about his non-existent degree, he claimed he believed he had the equivalent qualification obtained in 1965 from the Association of Electronic Engineers in Leicester. But neither the *Eye*, nor Mr Bates, could find or prove that that organisation had ever existed. Then Mr Bates claimed that though he thought he was entitled to use the qualification, he hadn't actually used it for court work. Wrong again!

Mr Bates was used as the computer expert by police in their trumped up charges against Sergeant Gurpal Virdi (see *Eyes passim*) who was accused of sending race hate mail to his fellow ethnic minority officers. At one time, when PS Virdi was supposed to be at his computer composing the offensive material, he was in fact miles away; and on another occasion pinpointed by Mr Bates, the material had already been printed and sealed in the office despatch system.

On his court witness statement, Mr Bates boldly declares: "I hold a Bachelor of Science degree in electronic engineering."

FIRE SAFETY

Whistle blow

HOSPITAL health and safety rep Paul Cockcroft has been given a written disciplinary warning and fire officer Chris Hindle remains suspended from work even though a new investigation into their concerns about the buildings where they worked has uncovered an "alarming lack of clarity" in fire safety regulations throughout the NHS.

Following six months of hearings, Leeds City Council's Scrutiny Board says the Department of Health firecode is too "open to interpretation" and that the NHS lacks a "sufficiently comprehensive" approach to fire safety, leaving health trusts to more or less design their own fire regulations when designing new buildings.

Fire safety reviews commissioned by the NHS Estates agency last year found problems with "documentation, design, construction, operation and management" (ie just about everything) relating to fire safety at three new PFI in-patient mental health units built for Leeds Mental Health Teaching NHS Trust. (see Eyes passim). Horrified Leeds councillors decided to hold their own inquiry into why the buildings were so bad. They found that, with no explicit NHS fire safety guidance for mental health facilities, the trust had decided that, rather than construct the Mount, Becklin and Newsam centres to "general hospital" standards for fire safety, they would comply with less stringent standards relating to "patient hotels".

The Scrutiny Board is now writing to Health Secretary Patricia Hewitt about the lack of any independent inspectorate overseeing fire safety in NHS buildings

In the City

WHEN it comes to certain areas of the City, leopards not only never change their spots but the spots just get bigger. Take for example the recent expensive experience of the AIM-listed Air Music & Media Group, which has had to write off the entire cost of its 2002 move into cheap DVDs (just over £3m) and put the business into administration last September.

That clearly came as a surprise to Air Music, as during the financial year to March 2005 it had issued more than 5m new shares as deferred earn-out consideration to the vendors of Hollywood DVD. Less surprisingly, there has been litigation with the vendors.

But should the failure of Hollywood DVD have come as such a shock? Not when you consider that one of the vendors was one Warren Alan Goldberg who has a history of involvement in companies which somehow fail to perform.

A long-time business associate of *Eye* favourite Paul Levinson, Goldberg was involved with Levinson in the sale of the Video Form chain to Gerald Ronson for £8m in 1983. Video Form cost Ronson some £10m in write-offs and racked up losses of £9m before it was closed in 1986.

"That's his poker face"

In the early 90s Levinson and Goldberg were involved in another video business, Priorswalk. This collapsed in 1995 owing £1m. Creditors were not amused when Goldberg, as director of Priorswalk, agreed the sale of part of the business to another company of which he was a director in return for a claimed debt.

Although Goldberg was at least a one-third shareholder in Hollywood DVD he was not a director. However, his son Marc was a director until 2004. It is no doubt unrelated that since 1999 another Warren Alan Goldberg has been banned from being a company director – a ban that runs until 2008.

Despite not being a director, Goldberg was the beneficiary of royalties and commissions paid by Hollywood DVD to his company Realman in addition to his share of the £750,000 cash and the 18m Air Music shares issued at 7.7p each. The shares went to 10p but are now 3p. These payments totalled around £250,000 in 2002 and 2003. In 2004 consultancy payments of £130,000 were paid to another Goldberg company, Creative Film Entertainment!

Most of those payments were made while Hollywood DVD was owned by Air Music & Media. Should all of this have surprised its directors? Well perhaps not entirely Air Music chief executive Mark Frey. He was involved with Levinson in his previous career at cheap CD provider Tring International. Meanwhile, Goldberg and Levinson have formed a new venture – Tango Entertainment. Let's dance!

THE decision to delay announcement of the latest cash-for-life peerages list is further confirmation of the concerns felt by at least some of those on the House of Lords Appointments Commission about some of the candidates.

The delay may not be good news for one of the most controversial figures on that list, stockbroker Barry "The Butler" Townsley.

Not only is there the past matter of his disciplining by the Stock Exchange for "gross misconduct" over share dealings for Sir Trevor Dawson which enabled the fund manager to steal from clients. More presently and pressingly is the very real possibility that Townsley will need to be interviewed (if only as a witness) by the City Police and the Serious Farce Office over what he knew about Langbar International/ Crown Corporation's non-existent £365m Brazilian cash horde.

Townsley's firm was broker to Crown when it floated and he worked closely with its original directors.

The Wilson government found itself mired in shame when three of Harold's favourites to whom he had awarded honours – Lords Kagan and Brayley plus Sir Eric Miller – ended up helping (or not) the police with their inquiries. Townsley is not like that trio; but the potential for Labour embarrassment could be great, especially for a new peer to have any part, however innocent, in a fraud inquiry.

MUCH publicity was given last month to the 12 and a half year-jail sentence given to tax evasion expert Ian Leaf. This is believed to be the second longest jail sentence ever given in Britain for a white collar crime. However, there was no mention of the role played by accountants in helping Leaf to engineer and market his schemes which robbed the taxman of an estimated £55m and netted Leaf maybe £22m.

But back in 1997 when the Revenue launched its investigation there were raids on several offices of leading accountants Ernst & Young and a leading tax partner resigned. Thankfully there was no need to drag the firm, already badly scarred by the Equitable experience, into the Leaf prosecution.

THE Serious Farce Office and the Fundamentally Supine Authority come in for their justified share of criticisms. But they appear like Eliot Ness's Untouchables in comparison with the jokers who run the European Union's fraudbusters OLAF/ULAF/WE-ALL-LAF.

OLAF has been accused of being ineffective in a series of recent reports. Since 1999 it has handled more than 300 cases but only produced 19 convictions and its investigations are taking much longer. It has also been accused of abuse of power – particularly in the case of the raid on the home and office of *Stern* journalist and critic Hans-Martin Tillack (*Eyes passim*).

But nothing better illustrates the bad joke that is OLAF than the comedy surrounding the inability of the EU to select a successor to the unimpressive Franz-Hermann Bruner, whose contract as director expired last March but who is still in charge.

Bruner initially tried to arrange matters so that he would be rubber-stamped for another five years. He did this by first dictating if not writing the specifications for the job and then only advertising it internally within the European Commission three days before Christmas 2004 with a closing date four weeks later. The clear intent was that he would be the only suitable candidate, if not the only candidate (as he was), as nobody outside would have been aware of the vacancy or able to apply in time.

That Bruner thought he could get away with such a stitch-up is proof to many in Brussels that he has friends in high places. And events since then have only confirmed that view. But when his initial obvious ploy was exposed, the administration commissioner Siim Kallas was forced to intervene and ensure the commission's own rules were met (a choice of *candidates*) and the post was advertised externally.

Of course by now it was too late for any one to be appointed before Bruner's contract expired on 1 March. The correct procedure would have been to appoint a temporary head as OLAF critics in the European Parliament wanted and Bruner's blatant fix justified. But no. Bruner was kept on and on and on until now while he continued to seek re-appointment.

The value of that position emerged in October when it was confirmed that "by accident" his office had been sent the evaluations of his rival candidates on the five-man shortlist. The commission insisted, however, that as soon as the "mistake" was discovered the files were returned.

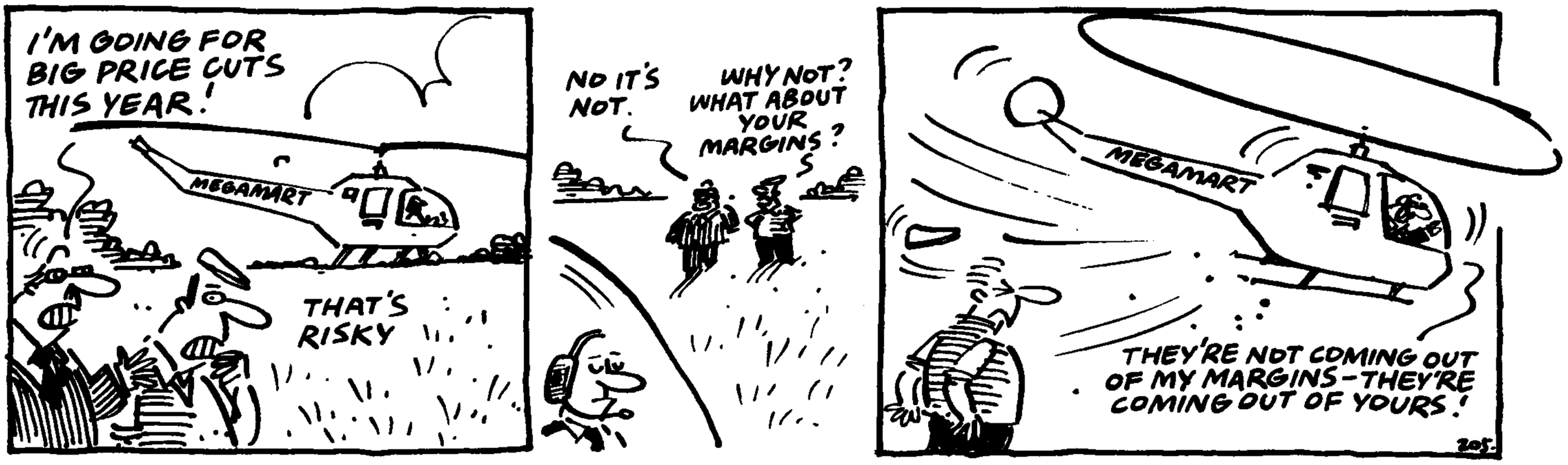
Despite such inside help Bruner, not surprisingly given the criticisms made of OLAF by MEPs and others, did not get the nod from the parliamentary budgetary control committee tasked with nominating the new director. Their vote by a big margin in October went to former Swedish police chief Bjorn Eriksson.

Bruner, however, still finished second. And rather than just forward Eriksson's name for approval, the MEPs sent forward both the Swede and Bruner. So the German was still in the frame.

Instead of accepting the MEPs' decision, the member states decided to reopen the whole selection procedure and interview again all five candidates on the shortlist, including a Belgian organised crime specialist who was the favourite until it was discovered (months after the EU received his cv) that he did not have one of the required qualifications!

THE DIRECTORS

DREDGE & RIGG


I'M GOING FOR BIG PRICE CUTS THIS YEAR!
MEGAMART
THAT'S RISKY
NO IT'S NOT.
WHY NOT? WHAT ABOUT YOUR MARGINS?
MEGAMART
THEY'RE NOT COMING OUT OF MY MARGINS – THEY'RE COMING OUT OF YOURS!
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Stock Horror

by 'Bruin'

Happy New Year from Clinton Cards

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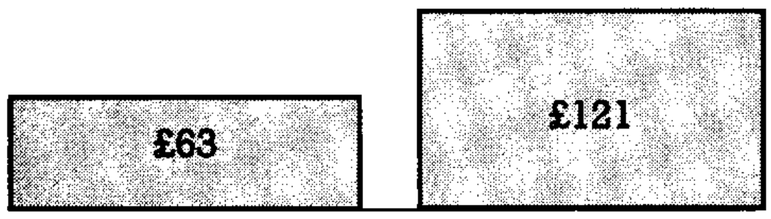


Once again to Brussels observers it looked like the Bruner fix was in. Why ask for all the candidates to be reinterviewed if not to cover a plan to suddenly find Bruner the best choice or at least to prevent the Swede getting the post? He had seemed a little too eager to fight fraud which is not welcome to the member countries which is where most of the fraud occurs.

So just before Christmas it leaked out that the ambassadors for the member states in Brussels, with Britain in the chair, had decided not on Eriksson but on a French audit specialist, Alain Gilette. Eriksson was second and Bruner third. Britain clearly did not see any advantage in making OLAF more effective by dumping Bruner and backing the MEPs' choice despite all the Blairite talk of making Europe more accountable such as by giving the Parliament more power.

But even that fudge did not decide the issue. For now the decision has been passed to the commission to sort out the mess in discussion with the Parliament and the member states. But with Bruner's name still in the hat there are those in Brussels who still do not rule out the possibility that he will after all this be reappointed. After all it can be said – he is still the man in post.

Meanwhile former SFO director Ros Wright has been appointed to the OLAF supervisory board and will now have to evaluate the job of Bruner or his successor as a crime fighter. You could not make it up!

ONCE again it is awards time at the Gnome Institute for Greed Management.

Crooks of the Year: Those former directors and others involved in creating the £365m fantasy Brazilian bank deposits of Crown Corporation, now Langbar International, who fooled investors, auditors and regulators. Sadly this was not a vote for British excellence as all those involved were if not from Brazil then from other foreign parts.

Newcomer of the Year: Philip Bennett, boss of broker Refco who managed to hide other people's losses totalling up to $720m long enough to float the company on Wall Street without anyone noticing.

Comeback of the Year: Frank Timis, Romania's greatest export to the world of finance, who overcame no fewer than three criminal convictions, bankruptcy and business failure in Australia to turn Regal Petroleum into a shortlived stock market star on the back of a Greek oil field that was not there.

Escapers of the Year: Piers "Morgan" Moron, Martin Cruddace and the other share traders at the *Daily Mirror* who piggy-backed on the buy-tip-sell criminality of the City Slickers Anil Bhoyrul and James Hipwell but who did not face jail. This prize was shared with Richard Scrushy who presided over HealthSouth while it experienced a near $3bn accounting fraud but was acquitted by a jury despite the testimony of a line of former executives.

Suits of the Year: Vanni Treves and Charles Thomson of Equitable Life, who wasted at least £30m of policyholders' money on the failed civil actions against former directors and auditors but do not have the decency to resign.

It was a very good year.

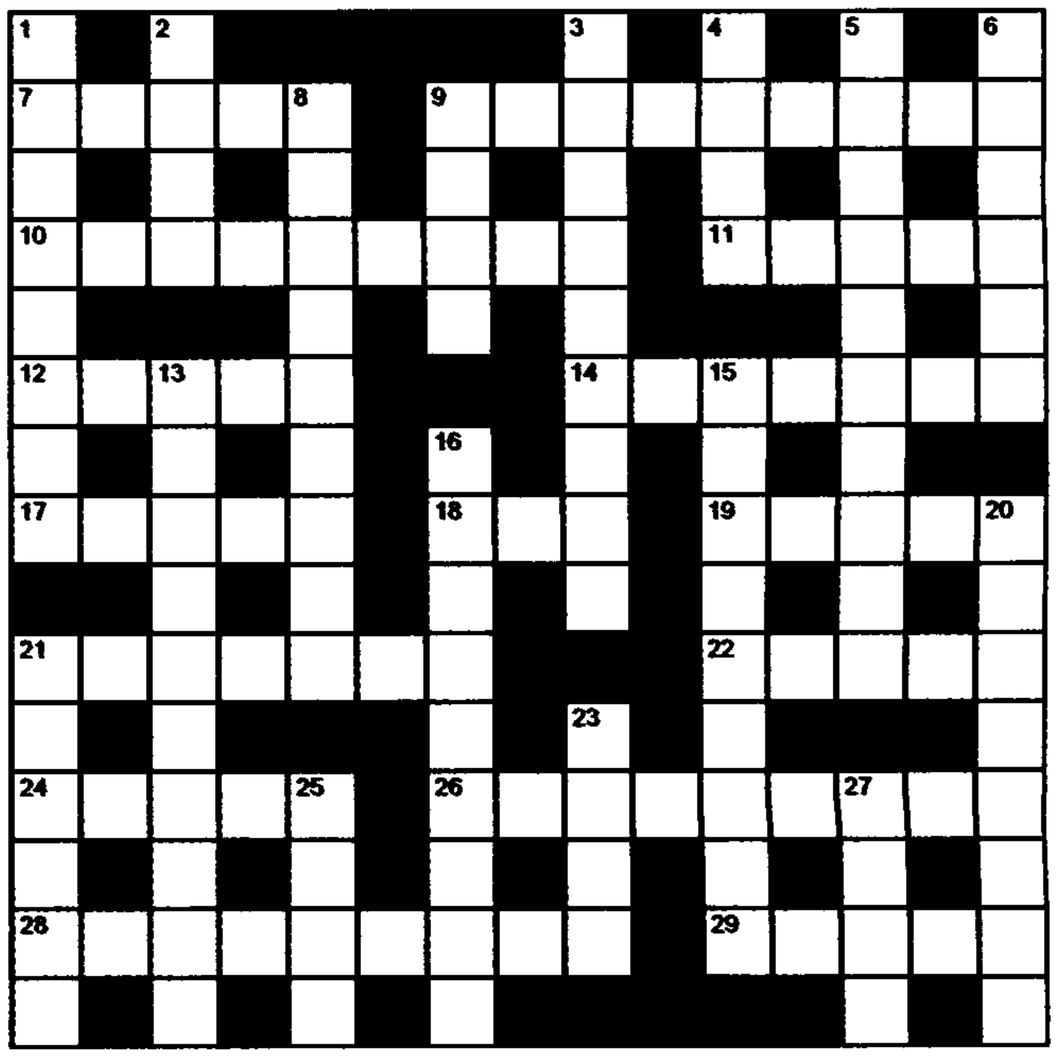
'Slicker'

EYE CROSSWORD 304

by Cyclops

£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 13 January 2006

Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk



ACROSS

7 Prince's collar round wife Camilla's butt (5)
9 Fanny's probing seems tart somehow (5,4)
10 Degenerate to manage Blair's first two kids (3,2,4)
11 After topless humping, pelvis half put out (5)
12/14 Camp follower was orgasmic on meeting "right-on" new leader (5,7)
17/4 Not just the cheeky bits of an utter bastard? (5,4)
18 Enthusiastic sort of sperm producer? (3)
19 Native American takes penis's first inch (5)
21 Lou's screwing around with Matt may be seen as a black and white issue (7)
22 Played by band just starting out (rock trio ringing Elton's tip) (5)
24 Youths in uniform into Queen vocal? (5)
26 Policeman unofficially makes a living by alien relocation (9)
28 More pornographic measurements taken by English sort of Tory woman? (4,5)
29 Major, possibly old Frenchman gets end away (5)

DOWN

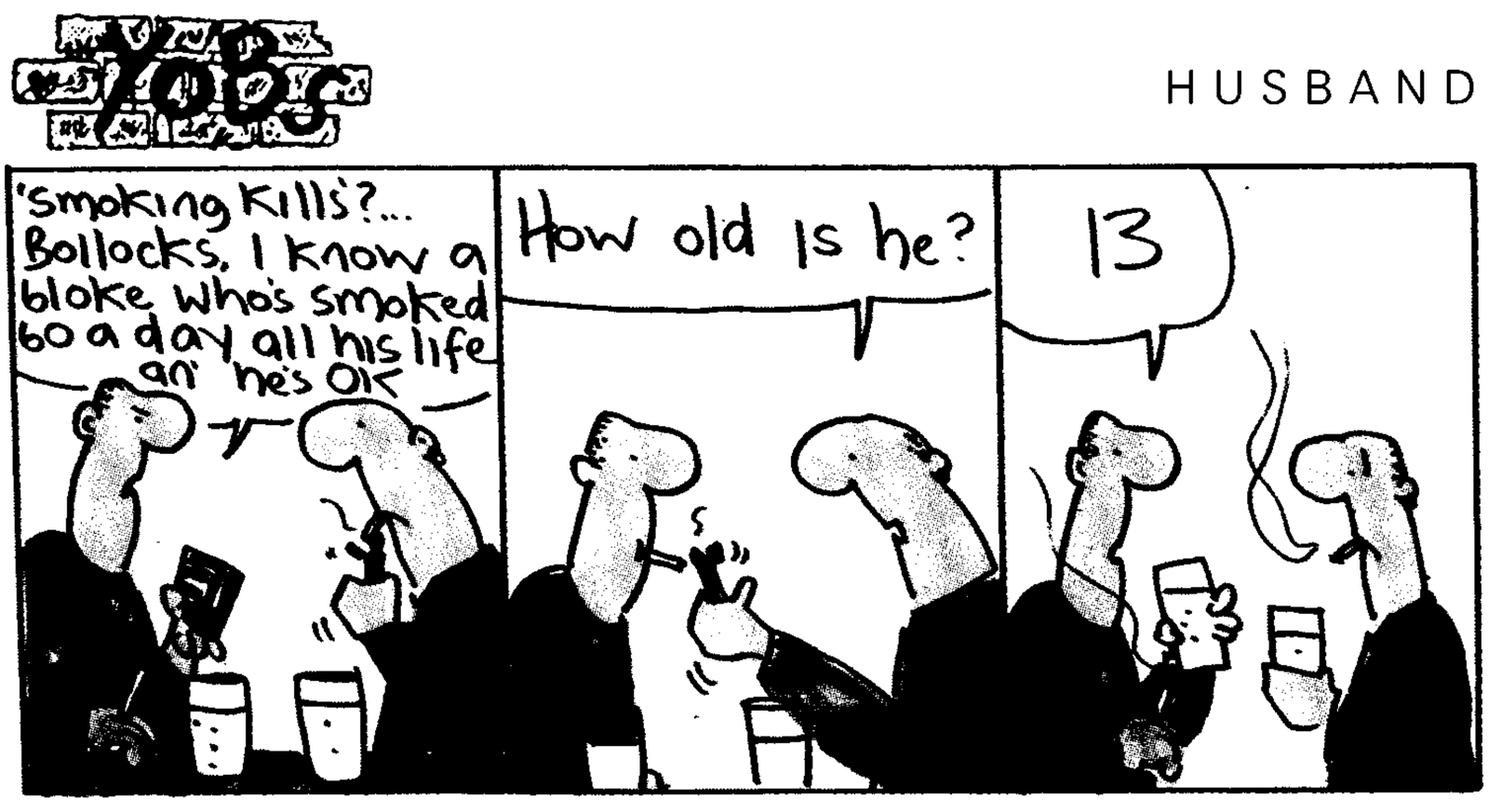
1 Nicer sort of day with sex and with money in the bank (2,6)
2 Reggie Kray responsible for Tories' first gain? (4)
3 Archer's skill: to fix advance with financial institutions (9)
4 See 17ac.
5 Pre-teen can't, without one, diddle smallish part (3,3,4)
6 One who dictated smear about Charlotte's middle (6)
8 "Gore: twat!" won't boost circulation (5,4)
9 Sun support for religious arse makes you puke (4)
13 What Ian McCartney would have us do: turn about and love Blair, finally (4,6)
15 The PM long ago abandoned Camilla in clutches of gutless bloke (9)
16 Popular glue-sniffer's thing: getting strapped (9)
20 As buggers do happen to corrupt (5-3)
21 Face doomed US president, a leader hanging on to power at all costs (6)
23 Tory back in front line politics – no leader, getting the sweats (4)
25 Right to intervene in any 'cruising' in Strand (4)
27 Informant securing Brown's end with craft (4)

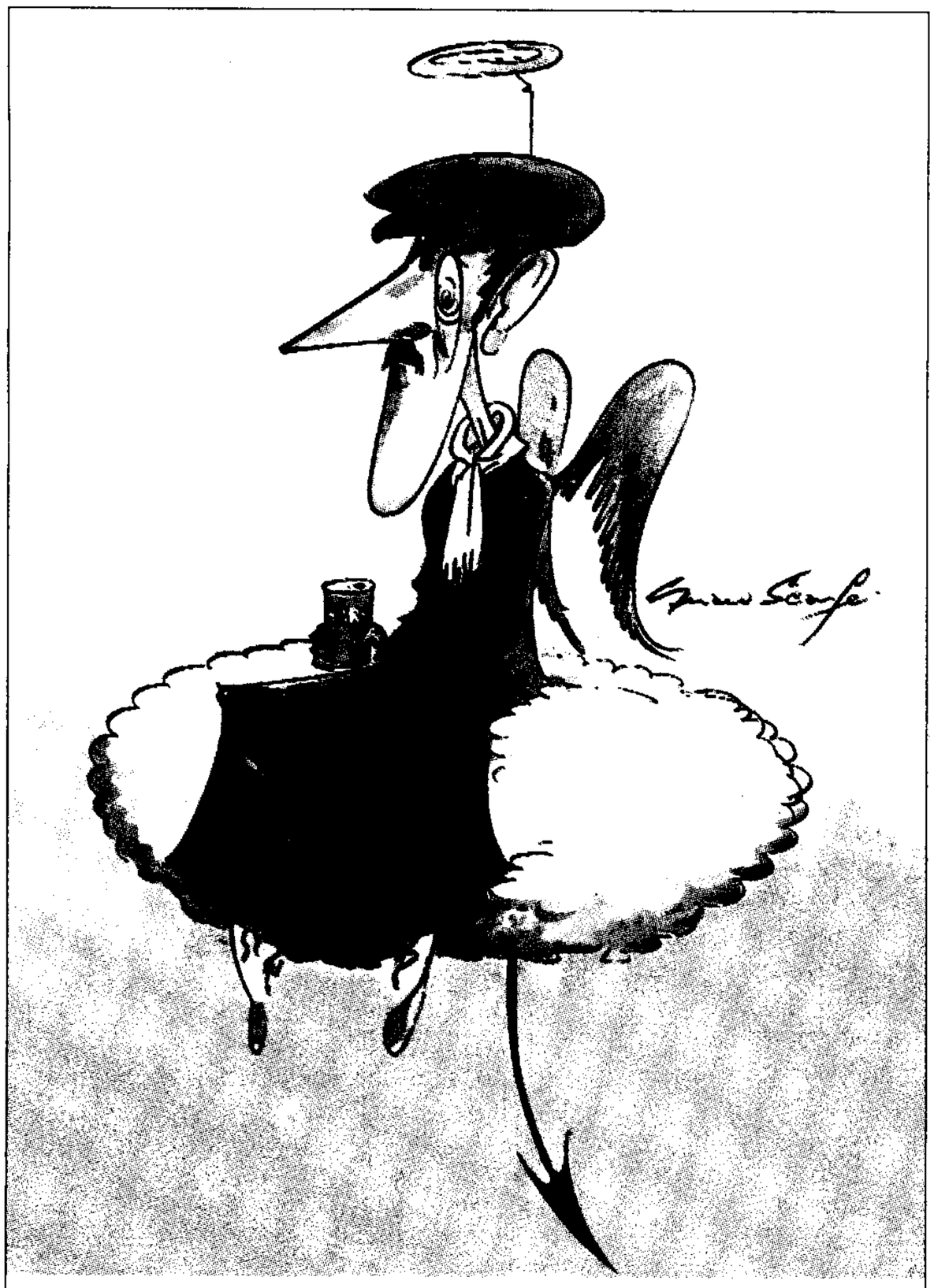
Crossword 303 winner: ROB FALCONER

ACROSS: 13 Small arms 14 Ailment 15 Tight-knit 16 Eden Project 17 In short 18 Cheapie 19 Mad Dogs and Englishmen 23 Cygnet 25 Ill-conceived 27 Easy come easy go 31 Loose 32 Sambo 33 Accords 34 Support 35 Whats up 37 Radii 38 Bastard 40 Error 41 Titan 43 Politic 45 Lisle 47 Accusal 49 Euro MPs 50 Epaulet 51 Alibi 52 Cocky 54 Open-handedness 55 Strap-hangers 56 Angora 58 Fall between two stools 63 Linctus 64 Dynasty 66 Opportunism 69 Jordanian 70 Open-air 71 Nightwear.

DOWN: 1 Grade 2 Telephoto lens 3 Porno 4 Epstein 5 Beat the record 6 Yelling 7 Evens 8 Antioch 9 Go to the dogs 10 Legacy 11 Jittery 12 Ninepenny Morris 20 Dildo 21 Sicks up 22 Irascibility 24 Reused 26 Immoral 28 Ypres 29 Apple 30 Marie Celeste 36 Attorney-General 39 America 42 Nymph 43 Posing 44 Train 46 Stay the course 47 Atishoo 48 Coconut butter 50 Ever and anon 53 Credo 57 Retrain 59 Line-out 60 Waylays 61 Tap into 62 Assisi 65 Smear 67 Rugby 68 Ileac.

PERIMETER NAMES: STEPHEN BAYLEY, AA GILL, JANET STREET-PORTER, LLOYDS TSB, MARIAH CAREY, ROGER SCRUTON, SIAN LLOYD, JULIA ROBERTS, WILLIAM REES-MOGG





A Celebration for Twelfth Night in words and music (sacred and secular) at the Hampstead Parish Church. With a selection of readings, music and carols the evening is a much looked forward to annual event.

Participants to be confirmed.

Previously, they have included Jane Asher, Stephen Fry, Robert Powell, Phil Cornwell, Jon Culshaw, Josie Lawrence, Aidan McArdle, Jonathan Aris, Claudia Barton and Ray Shell.

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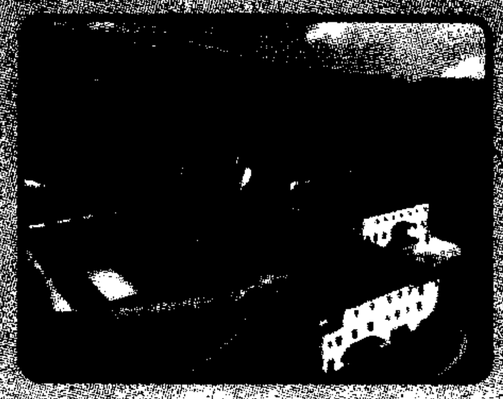

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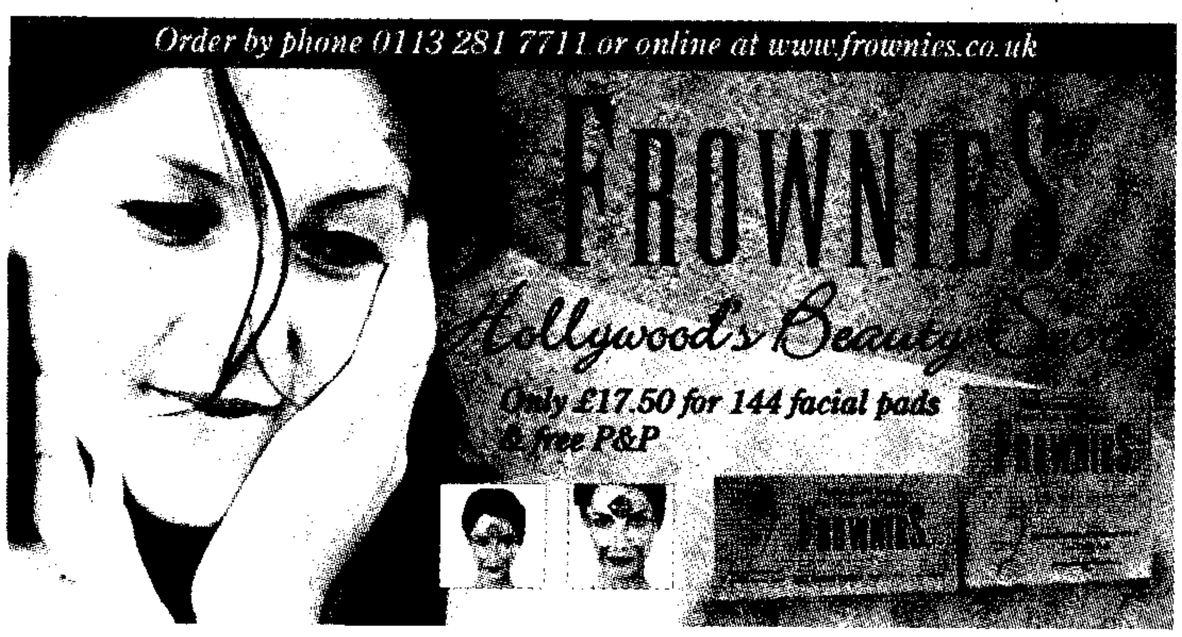

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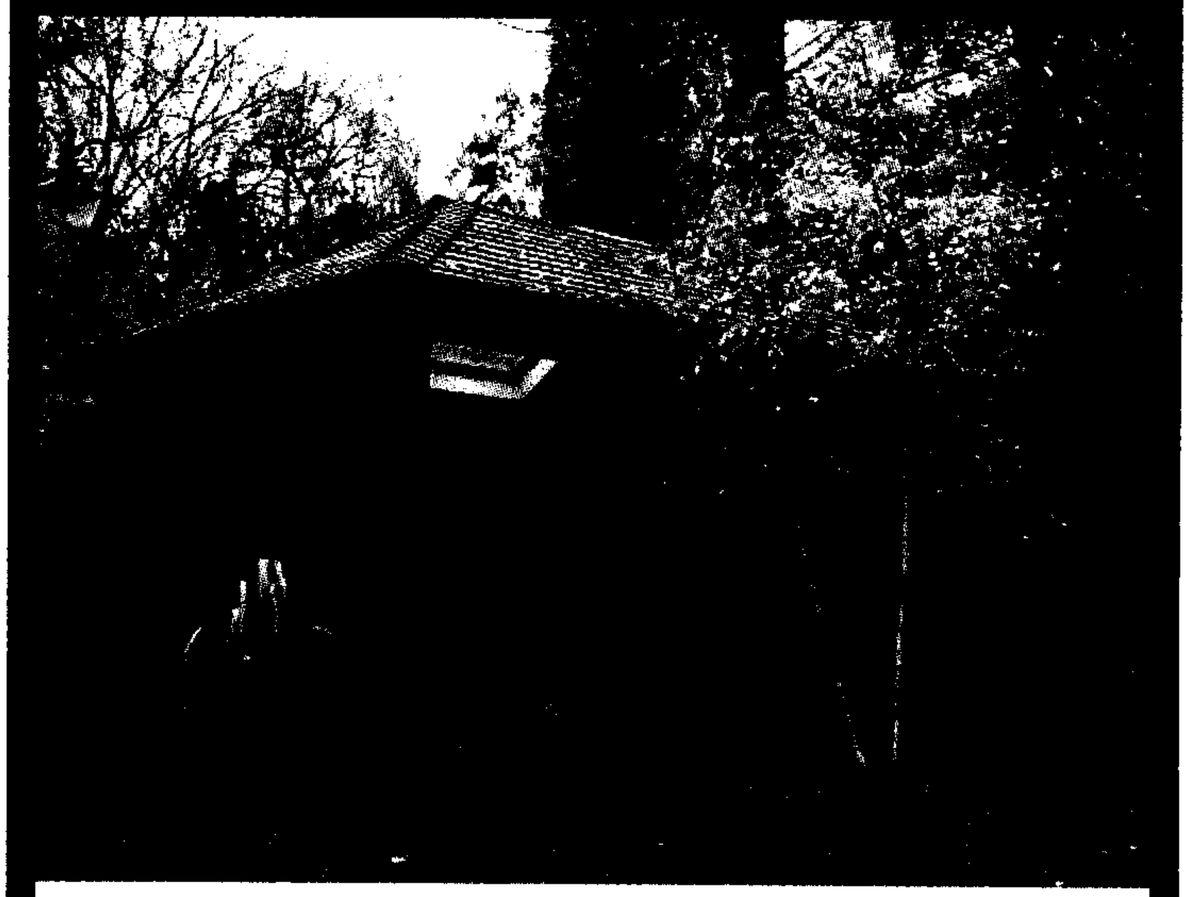

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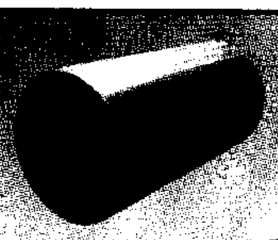

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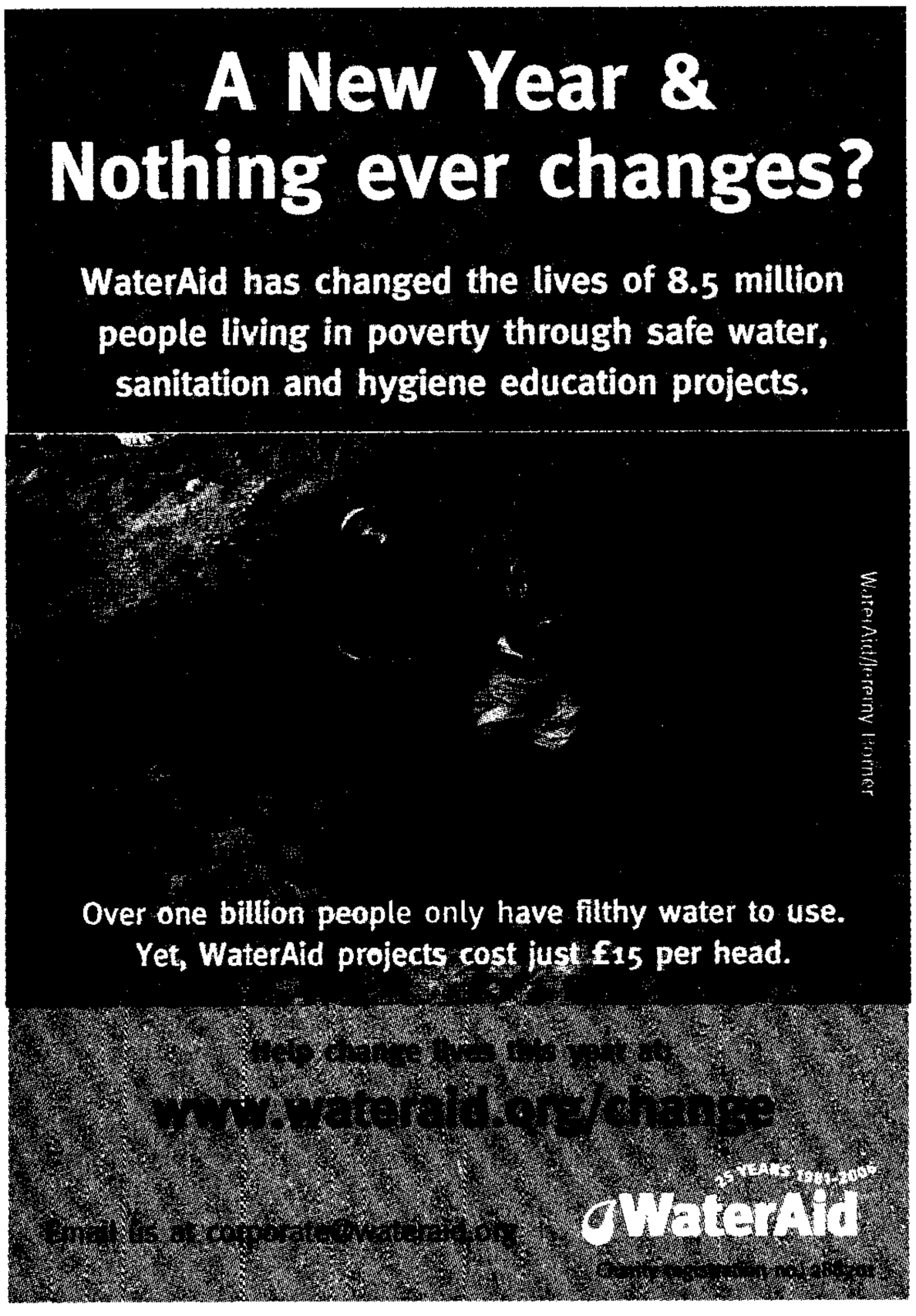
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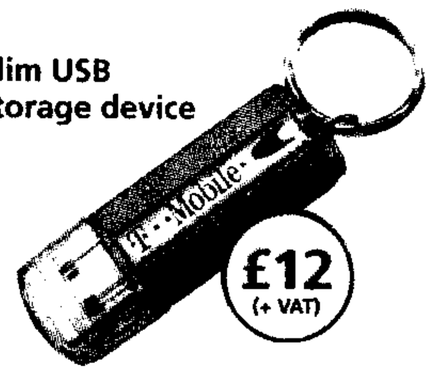

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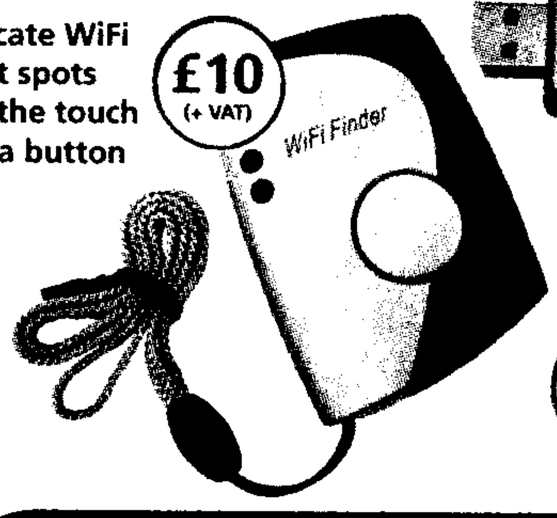

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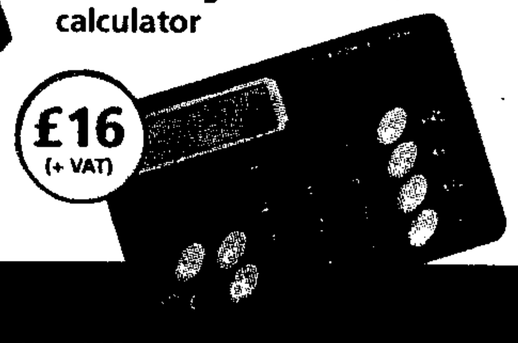

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CAPITAINE: I'm thinking of you and Diana. Happy New Year. Love Sous-Fifre.

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MONKEYS don't have laptops: so much for evolution.

[redacted]

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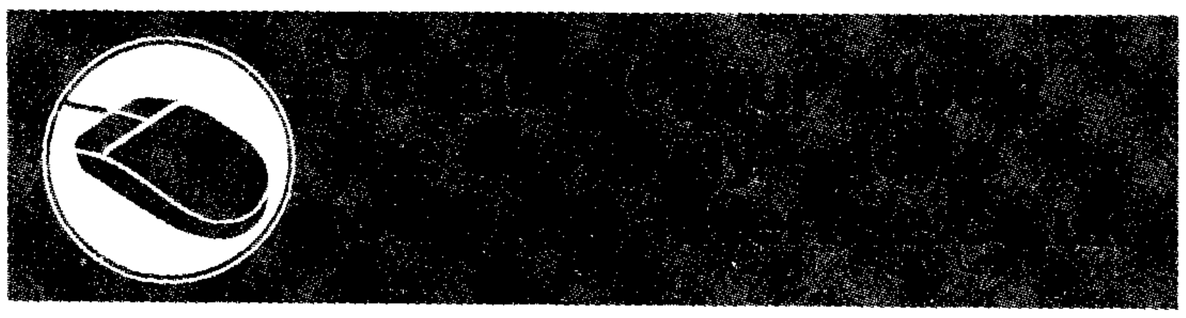

DESPAIRING DESIGNER needs dosh to survive while seeking muse. HSBC, S/C: 40-44-04. A/C: 41490133.

5K NEEDED to reduce crippling student debt, all contributions much appreciated. HSBC, S/C: 40-34-08. A/C: 81450565.

YOUNG GENT struggling with debt. Much gratitude for anything. S/C: 16-30-10; A/C: 10004640 or call 07966 790 798.

TWO FRIGHTENED, elderly, single, vulnerable ladies desperately need help regarding a bullying neighbour. Reply Box 151742.

SOLITARY BATTLE against corruption. Money and faith is fading. Please donate to help this law changing litigation. S/C: 40-34-25. A/C: 9113846.

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FEMALE ARTIST requests assistance from appreciative patron. Barclays, S/C: 20-54-89. A/C: 40552437. tannitoo@yahoo.co.uk

DISABLED LADY needs money for house repairs. No support. Abbey, S/C: 09-01-26. A/C: X4348854BAR.

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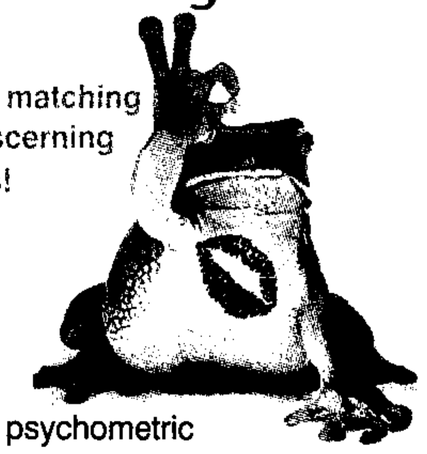

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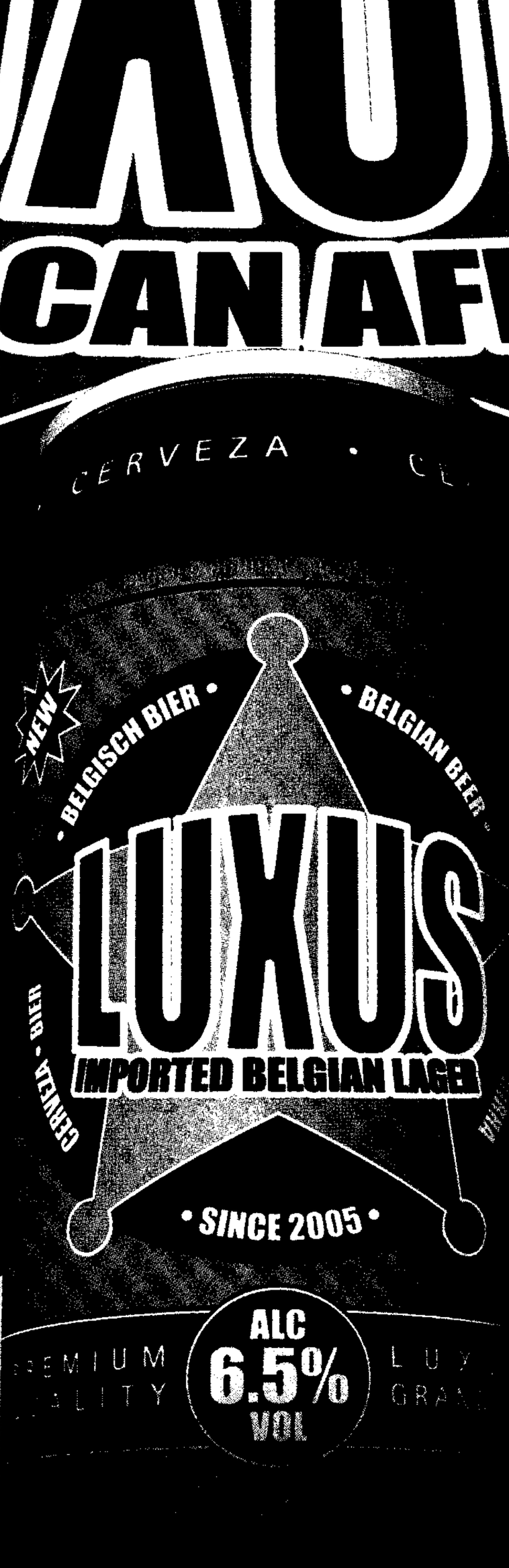

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